

BLUE BONNET: DÉBUTANTE



LELA HORN RICHARDS

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Indexed

BLUE BONNET—DÉBUTANTE

The Blue Bonnet Series

By
Lela Horn Richards
and
Caroline E. Jacobs



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Blue Bonnet

The Blue Bonnet Series

BLUE BONNET: DEBUTANTE

BY
LELA HORN RICHARDS

A SEQUEL TO
BLUE BONNET KEEPS HOUSE

By
CAROLINE E. JACOBS
and
LELA HORN RICHARDS

Illustrated by
ELIZABETH WITHINGTON



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TO THE MEMORY
OF
EMILIA JACOBS
CAROLINE E. JACOBS
EDYTH ELLERBECK READ
IN GRATEFUL APPRECIATION

L. H. R.

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Blue Bonnet—Débutante

CHAPTER I

BLUE BONNET'S DREAMS COME TRUE

BLUE BONNET ran up the steps of the wide veranda and rang the bell impatiently.

"Is my uncle at home?" she said to the maid who answered the summons.

"Yes, Miss Ashe, in the den. He came in about an hour ago."

"Thank you, Hester. I'm so glad." She gave a low clear whistle and was answered by the same note from the den. A moment later a man's head peered from the door anxiously.

"Yes, Honey, what's the matter? Anything happened? That signal sounded like distress."

"Distress! Oh, no, quite the reverse. That whistle registered joy. You're not a bit good at reading human nature. Look, Uncle Cliff, I have them at last—the plans for the Elizabeth Clyde Home. I'm quite crazy about them."

She thrust the roll of blue prints into his hand, and, linking her arm through his, piloted him to the desk where he usually did his writing.

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"Unroll them," she commanded.

Mr. Ashe started to unroll the prints but his fingers were slow and clumsy and Blue Bonnet took them away impatiently.

"Excuse me, Uncle Cliff," she said, "but I want to show them to you; I know all about them, you see. John and I spent nearly two hours with Mr. Feganza this afternoon going over them and making suggestions. There, isn't that *be-au-tiful*? That's the front elevation, and this is the back, and that one you have in your hand is the side. This —"

"Wait a minute, Honey; wait a minute. Not so fast. This is the front, you say. Why, that's a very good-looking building!"

"*Good-looking!* It's wonderful, Uncle Cliff, *wonderful!* Look at that fascinating entrance. Isn't it wide and hospitable? And see the portecochère here at the side, and the big sunny windows."

"But it looks like a dwelling, Honey —"

"Of course it does! That's what it was intended to look like. There isn't to be a thing institutional about it. It's a home, Uncle Cliff; a *home*, not an asylum."

"Of course, Honey, of course!"

"And look, Uncle Cliff, this is the plan of the ground floor: the big kindergarten room, the library and playroom, the dining-room and kitchen."

She drew up a chair and began to trace a bewil-

dering set of white lines that twisted and turned confusingly.

"Don't hurry so, Honey, I can't follow you. This is the entrance, I suppose." Mr. Ashe put a determined finger on a line that led to the front door.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, Uncle Cliff. I'm so excited. You don't know what it means to have your dreams come true all at once. Something you've *hoped* for and *longed* for and *prayed* for and *demand*ed — I did almost *demand*, didn't I, Uncle Cliff, just as soon as I came into my money?"

"You didn't have to demand, Blue Bonnet. The money was yours."

"And I wrote my first big check to-day. John helped me. I was terribly afraid I wouldn't do it right. You see, I'm not used to so many figures. They're going to begin to-morrow, Uncle Cliff — think of it — begin to build my *Home* and the contractor had to have money, and —"

She didn't finish the sentence. Something rose in her throat and stopped the words. The next instant she was in Uncle Cliff's arms, struggling with tears that would come, despite the effort to hold them back.

"Why, Blue Bonnet — tears!" Mr. Cliff said, amazed. "What is there to cry about?"

Blue Bonnet searched for a handkerchief and managed to turn a sob into a laugh.

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“Just joy, Uncle Cliff, *sheer joy!* When I think of all the forlorn, poor little kiddies this house is going to shelter, and what it is going to mean to tired, worn-out mothers and brave little sisters; and what I hope it is going to mean to the neighborhood in general, why I—I have to cry. I suppose it’s because I’m a woman—I don’t know any other reason. But I’m losing time. Now look, this is the kindergarten room, and this the dining-room. I don’t know which I like the best. Mr. Feganza seems to have been inspired—they’re so exactly what they should be. The kindergarten room is very large and sunny, and the dining-room is a dream—or will be when it’s finished in blue and white.”

She paused and drew a long sigh of satisfaction.

“We’ll come back to this floor a little later. I want to show you the day nursery. That’s my special pride, for I designed it.”

“You designed it?”

Blue Bonnet nodded.

“Yes, and Mr. Feganza paid me quite a compliment. He said I missed my calling by not being an architect. Now see—it’s to be a long room with plenty of wide windows and good ventilation.”

Mr. Ashe bestowed a look of pride on Blue Bonnet.

“Where did you ever get an idea of architecture, Honey?”

"Oh, we had drawing at Miss North's and I adored it. Look now, Uncle Cliff, these queer little lines over here are where the beds go; tiny little baby beds that let down in tiers from the wall — like sleeping car berths, you know, only they are to be made of iron and painted white. Each bed has a mattress as soft as down, and a snowy blanket and quilt. And over here," she traced a line knowingly, "are the bathrooms for the infants — three of them, all finished in white tiles with darling little tubs and tables."

"Tables?"

"Yes — to put the little people on when you dress them. You don't know a thing about babies, do you, Uncle Cliff? I expect to have the time of my life with these kiddies."

"You don't expect to bathe them yourself, do you, Honey?" Mr. Ashe's gaze was anxious.

"Of course — if the nurses will let me."

"Nonsense, Blue Bonnet! You'll catch all sorts of things. Those children are dirty. They come from all kinds of places."

"Yes — they do, Uncle Cliff, that's true. Gabriel was brought up in the tenement district. You never know what babies might be if they had a chance. Look at Gabriel."

"But Gabriel was well born. Gabriel's an exception."

"No one had discovered it until I found him."

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"True, but there aren't many people looking for stray children."

"More's the pity, Uncle Cliff."

There was a rustle of skirts in the doorway and Blue Bonnet turned to greet Mrs. White.

"Come in," she called gayly, and reached for a chair. "I'm just showing Uncle Cliff the plans for the Home. They're wonderful, Mrs. White. Do try to convince him that I wasn't destined to die of tuberculosis or small-pox, *please*. He has me marked for one of the other. I've always suspected that deep down in Uncle Cliff's heart I've been a disappointment because I refused to have croup when I was a baby, and couldn't catch the whooping cough. Benita always kept goose grease by the pound, and ran for it every time I sneezed—but nothing doing!"

She laughed a gay little laugh, and, reaching over, gave her Uncle's arm a tight squeeze. "Isn't that true?" she asked.

But Mr. Ashe was deep in the plans.

The summer had passed all too quickly, and brought few changes. Blue Bonnet had celebrated her eighteenth birthday, and had, in a measure, been given the reins of government. There had been little ceremony about it.

There had been a birthday dinner at the charming cottage the family had occupied at the seaside. There had been a birthday cake with eighteen glow-

ing candles snuggled cunningly in white candied rosebuds, and a package — a heavy, rather unattractive looking package, Blue Bonnet thought as she opened it and beheld the long white envelope and documental papers. She was a little disappointed and bewildered.

“It looks horribly like business, Uncle Cliff,” she complained as she slipped a check book from among the envelopes. “Does it mean that I am of age, and am to write my own checks — that my old allowance is gone?”

“Not legally of age, Honey. Down in Texas you have to be twenty-one, and in Massachusetts, also, I believe. It means that you are a young woman now, and that you must have some freedom in spending your own money. I trust you not to be extravagant. If you are, I shall take the check book away and notify the bank that you are in disgrace —”

“Uncle Cliff!”

There was a merry twinkle in the eyes that met her own.

“Well, you needn’t worry. Any one who has been trained by Aunt Lucinda will never grow reckless. You’re perfectly safe. But the papers, Uncle Cliff?”

“I have held them in trust for a good many years, Blue Bonnet. It’s time you knew something of your interests. We’ll talk about the papers at some other time.”

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Blue Bonnet gave a little sigh of relief and pushed them across the table toward her Uncle.

“And the check book — you’ll keep that?”

“Yes, and thank you very much. I’ll have a lovely time with the check book. But you mustn’t worry. I promise not to be foolish.”

There had followed days of happiness; days when neither Blue Bonnet nor her Uncle would allow business affairs to mar the perfection of the waning summer hours: hours when they strolled out over the shining sands, played in the billowy waves of the old Atlantic, or sailed over its smooth blue surface.

But with autumn, and the return to the city, things had changed materially. Playtime was over, and Blue Bonnet surprised Mr. Ashe with a very early call one morning after breakfast. He was lighting a cigar preparatory to enjoying his morning paper when her face came between him and the printed page.

“Would you mind if I talk with you a minute, Uncle Cliff?” she said, perching as of old on the arm of his chair. “There are a number of things I want to know.”

Mr. Ashe put aside the paper with a smile.

“Take away that frown between your eyes, Honey, and I’m at your service. What’s wrong? Has Algernon Sidney disappeared again, or am I to decide whether Solomon is to take up his residence

here or in Texas? Out with it. I know it's important."

"It is, Uncle Cliff. It's about my property. Oh, dear, I wish there wasn't so much of it. I suppose I ought to begin to think about — or *know* about investments and stocks and bonds and — *cattle!* Perhaps I should take a course in business; at a college, or somewhere. I've always loathed mathematics, but I reckon I ought to know how to compute interest and keep a set of books."

"Didn't you learn how to compute interest in school?"

"Oh, after a fashion, but I'd hate to trust my methods if anything very big were involved. Anyway, I ought to brush up. It is four years since I even glanced at a problem."

"Perhaps that wouldn't be a bad idea, Blue Bonnet, but I thought you had given up the idea of college."

"So I had — a regular college course, but a business college is different. Two girls from Miss North's are entering Simmons this year. They're going to be private secretaries."

"You can engage a secretary, Honey."

"So I could, but how would I instruct her? I don't know the first thing about business."

Uncle Cliff ran his fingers through his hair and meditated.

"I wanted you to have a little recreation this

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winter, Blue Bonnet. You've worked pretty hard the past three years. Perhaps we might arrange for a few hours a day — get a tutor. I'll look into the matter. And, by the way, take this chair. I have some things I want to talk over with you."

Blue Bonnet sat down, a trifle anxious.

"I hope there isn't anything worrying you, Uncle Cliff. You look so serious."

Mr. Ashe opened a drawer in the table and took a letter from a neat pile.

"No — not worried exactly, and I don't want you to be. It's about Uncle Joe. He doesn't seem to be so well this fall, and I'm afraid we've either got to go back to the ranch or get somebody to help him."

Blue Bonnet sat very still, dreading what would follow.

"You mean, Uncle Cliff, that we may have to leave Boston; go back to the ranch to live?" She hadn't realized what that meant until she voiced the suggestion.

"I'm afraid *I* will have to, unless somebody can be found to take Joe's place. He's getting old, Honey, and cares weigh on him."

"But there's Mr. Judson."

"Mr. Judson isn't a cattleman, Honey, he's a minister."

"I know, but I thought he and Mrs. Judson were doing so well with everything."

"So they are with Uncle Joe behind them, oiling



"BLUE BONNET SAT VERY STILL, DREADING WHAT WOULD FOLLOW"

the wheels and putting the machinery in motion. Read this."

He held out the letter and Blue Bonnet read it through a mist of tears. There was a newsy preamble, and then:

"I'm a leetle bit afraid I'm going to have to lay by before long, Cliff. This durn rhumatiz is getting the best of me. I can't get out over the place like I once did. I was laid up nigh all of last week and things was at sixes and sevens. Judkins is all right as a man, but he'd shine brighter in a pulpit than on a ranch. With all due respects to the calling, I never saw a parson yet that was worth shucks when it come to business. They mean well, but meanin' and doin' is two different things. Better try to come back for awhile this fall, and keep your eye open for some young feller that knows the lay of the land down here, if you make up your mind not to stay.

"We've never wasted words, Cliff, and we ain't going to now, but I can see the handwritin' on the wall. I ain't goin' to wear out these pains and aches, they're goin' to *get me*. Give my love to Blue Bonnet. I get powerful homesick for her sometimes, but I reckon Texas ain't in it with Boston, and the old ranch won't see much of her in the future. Can't you spare me the little feller for the winter? Every beast on the place misses

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him. Tell him José's got a new broncho for him to help bust, and I bet he'll come so fast you won't see him for the dust."

Blue Bonnet folded the letter and handed it back, but the lump in her throat forbade utterance.

"I'm afraid he needs us, Honey. Maybe not right away. I don't think there's any immediate danger of — of Joe's leaving us, but he's getting feeble, there's no denying that. How he misses Gabriel, the little rascal."

"He misses all of us," Blue Bonnet found words to say, "and we must go back to him before it is too late. I am afraid we have been selfish to stay away so long."

"Now I don't want you to worry over this, Blue Bonnet. Like enough, Joe isn't as poorly as he thinks he is. Old people have queer notions. I'll write him that we'll take a trip South sometime before long, and that will cheer him up considerably."

Blue Bonnet went back to the arm of her uncle's chair.

"Uncle Cliff," she said, as her arm went round his shoulder, "tell me something, please. Are you happy here in Boston? Wouldn't you rather live in Texas? Sometimes I have a horrible fear that — that maybe you're making a sacrifice. That you're staying here on my account."

"Are you happy here, Honey?"

"Yes, very, of course, but —"

"Then doesn't it follow that I'm happy?"

"Now, Uncle Cliff, you're hedging."

"Why do you say I'm hedging?"

"Because — everybody has to be happy on his own account, not just to please somebody else."

"Didn't you ever hear that happiness was born a twin? It *always* depends on somebody else. You have to share it to possess it."

Blue Bonnet stooped and left a tender little kiss on the hair that was beginning to show gray at the temples, and patted the shoulder affectionately.

"It's utterly useless to argue with you, Uncle Cliff," she said softly; "you should have been a lawyer. You get people so mixed up in arguments."

"Have you been having difficulties with the legal mind?"

Blue Bonnet's face grew rosy.

"I suppose you are referring to John," she said, and the flush deepened. "He never argues; he lets me have my own way."

"Wise young man!"

"But, Uncle Cliff, when do you think we ought to go to Texas?"

"I haven't made any plans yet, Blue Bonnet. This letter only came yesterday; but I have been wondering if it would not be rather pleasant to take Mrs. White, and perhaps Aunt Lucinda and Sarah Blake down to the ranch for the Christmas holidays

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We could leave the latter part of October and take in the Exposition at San Francisco. Maybe Churchill would join us."

"Perhaps he would; but he has a big case coming up soon — a really truly big one. He was telling me only yesterday. He is as enthusiastic about his cases as I am about the Home. But I'm sure Mrs. White would love the trip, and Aunt Lucinda and Sarah, too."

"Very well, Honey, talk it over and make your plans. I am ready at any time."

Blue Bonnet started to leave the room but turned suddenly.

"Why, Uncle Cliff," she said, and her eyes were wide with surprise, "how can I go away when I'm building? I can't leave the Home to the contractor and Mr. Feganza. It wouldn't be at all as I want it. I suppose we'll make a lot of changes as we go along."

"Don't you think that John would look after it for you? He seems to know all your wishes along that line."

"But you said perhaps he would go with us."

"And you said that he had a big case —"

"Yes, so I did, but I think — perhaps he could arrange to leave for a little while — if — if we urged him."

"You think he would put pleasure before business?"

Blue Bonnet's expression changed instantly.

"Oh, no, Uncle Cliff, *never!* But he might try to arrange to spend a little time with us. I don't know just when this case he spoke of is to come up — it may be later in the winter."

She went out of the room with a little smile hovering about her lips, and Mr. Ashe took up his paper and scanned its columns with eyes that comprehended not. He put it down presently and relighting his cigar went over to the window where he stood for a long time, lost in thought.

Blue Bonnet ran up the stairs lightly, and, entering her room, went straight to her desk. The next instant she was busy with a letter to Uncle Joe, a letter full of apologies for seeming neglect, and hope for his recovery. When she had finished, she went up another flight of stairs to Gabriel's room, from which issued the customary morning strains of a violin.

To say that Gabriel was faithful to his practicing would be putting it mildly. The passion absorbed him. He never knew where the time went when he began, and often Blue Bonnet would take the instrument away from him, threatening to keep it unless he lived more in the sunshine and gave better attention to his books.

Two weeks had passed since the return from the seashore. Gabriel had gained every day during his stay there, and had come home sun tanned and

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strong. Blue Bonnet decided to keep him with her in Boston for awhile and had engaged a tutor whose services were given between the hours of ten and twelve, daily.

Twice a week he had lessons on the violin from a noted teacher. He was growing rapidly, mentally and physically, and Blue Bonnet could scarcely have looked upon him with more pride had he been her brother by ties of blood.

The child turned from his music as Blue Bonnet entered the room and gave her a bright smile; then with courtesy that is inborn, put aside his instrument and brought a chair for her.

"How's it coming, Gabriel, the new exercise?"

"Oh, fine! Herr Von Waggoner says that I get it the best of any of his pupils."

Blue Bonnet made no comment. She liked to encourage Gabriel, but she did not wish him to become too self-satisfied.

"Would it not be better to let Herr Von Waggoner tell me that, dear?"

Gabriel looked abashed.

"I didn't mean to boast, Blue Bonnet. I only thought you would be glad. Mr. Gilmore says I'm the stupidest boy he ever saw in books, sometimes."

Blue Bonnet laughed, and, putting her arm round the boy, drew him close.

"Of course I'm proud of you, Gabriel," she said, "but I should hate to see you too confident. It

takes years and years to accomplish anything with the violin, and no end of work."

"I'm not afraid of the work, Blue Bonnet. It isn't *work* for me. But gee, I hate grammar and spelling and geography. I don't see why a feller has to spell for, anyway. Signs would do if everybody would use 'em. And fractions! They make me sick! All about the denominator and the denominator."

"You mean numerator, Gabriel."

"Well, something like that."

"And why do you dislike geography?"

"Oh, it's so stupid — all 'ceptin' the volcanos, and I never can tell longitude from latitude. I like the dancing school though. Say, Blue Bonnet, there's a girl there that wears a pink dress. She's a peach! I love pink."

Blue Bonnet caught her breath quickly. There passed before her vision, as it so often did, Gabriel's mother's room, disorderly with the pink gowns and withered flowers. She wondered why Gabriel loved pink, and asked him.

"Oh, because it's so pretty," he answered. "My mother loved it, too."

"Did she ever say *why* she loved it, Gabriel?"

"Yes — she did once. She said when she was little her mother used to make her wear blue to match her eyes, and she hated it, and when she grew up she always had everything pink, *everything*, ex-

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cepting after my father went away. There was no money then for anything pretty.”

“And you like this little girl because she wears a pink dress?”

Gabriel nodded.

“And because she’s got something”—there was no word in his limited vocabulary to express what he wanted to say, so he caught up his violin, and playing a low plaintive strain began to take steps to the music, his lithe slender body swaying with the grace and abandon of a lily blown by a summer wind.

“You mean rhythm, I think, Gabriel!” Blue Bonnet explained, and again the boy nodded. “And this little girl, what is her name?”

Gabriel did not know, did not care. She had appealed to his esthetic nature, satisfied his sense of beauty, which was enough for the present. He went back to his practicing again and Blue Bonnet left him, laughing softly.

The little flashes which the child so often revealed of his past life interested Blue Bonnet tremendously, but she never urged Gabriel to discuss his mother’s trials and deprivations. It would seem like prying into secrets that the grave had closed and sealed.

One thing worried her greatly. She had spent hours trying to plan a way to tell Gabriel that John Churchill was his uncle, but the opportune moment had never come. It had been hard, with her impulsive nature, to keep the secret. Many times she



Elizabeth Wetherington

" HE CAUGHT UP HIS VIOLIN "

was on the verge of telling him, but something held her.

And, strange to say, the subject had never been mentioned between her and John since the night they had discovered who he was. Sometimes she would come upon the two suddenly, for they were great friends; John came to the house with the greatest freedom. John's arm was always about the lad, his eyes hungry with affection: affection returned by the boy an hundred fold.

"It will be better to let John win him over by kindness and love," she said once to Uncle Cliff. "When their friendship is so strong that even prejudice cannot break it, the time will be right to tell Gabriel of the relationship," and Mr. Ashe had agreed.

And so the days moved on pleasantly, happily. Mrs. White was now one of the family, making her way into hearts that opened to her, filling a niche in Blue Bonnet's life that had long been void.

Carita was back at Miss North's after a wonderful summer spent with her mother and relatives in Maine, and although mourning her mother's departure for the ranch, was happy under Blue Bonnet's roof, which had grown to be home, indeed.

Fräulein, too, contrary to expectation, had blossomed under favorable conditions, and was regularly installed as housekeeper, which suited her far better than teaching. And while she occasionally

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called the maids to task with threats of "reporting them to Miss Ashe," she fitted into her groove as neatly as if she had been made for it, and contributed largely to the comfort of the household.

CHAPTER II

A VISIT TO WOODFORD

THE first week in October found Blue Bonnet and her household busy with plans. Excitement was in the air. Gabriel amused Blue Bonnet one day by remarking, as he saw her hanging up gowns and folding away stacks of dainty white muslins, "you believe in preparedness all right, don't you?"

"What do you know about preparedness, Gabriel?"

"Oh, a lot! Uncle Cliff and I believe in it. If I was a man, I'd join the National Guard."

"Gabriel, you think too much about war. I want you to get it out of your mind. This beautiful country of ours is not going to enter into anything so brutal and disgusting."

Gabriel was determined.

"Uncle Cliff says if you met a lion and he wanted to eat you up, you'd have to know how to fight him — be ready for him, or he'd get you. You can see that, can't you, Blue Bonnet?"

"But if lions and all wild animals knew that people were their friends they wouldn't want to fight, would they?"

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Gabriel looked doubtful.

“Yes — but you wouldn’t want to — to persuade the *first* lion, would you, Blue Bonnet? Somebody would have to.”

“Somebody always has to be the first. Look at the pioneers, the men who made this country what it is to-day. That’s the way we get heroes.”

The argument had been put to flight by the entrance of Mrs. White with an armful of packages.

The suggestion that Christmas be spent in the South had met with general approval. It had been decided that Fräulein should take entire charge of the house and make a home for Carita during the absence.

Mrs. White was to accompany the party, but Blue Bonnet had not quite made up her mind about Gabriel. He was doing so nicely with his music, and was apparently so well, that she had half a mind to let him remain in Boston.

“It will be dreadful to be separated from him at Christmas,” she said to Uncle Cliff, “but his education has been neglected quite long enough. I know from experience how dissipation breaks into study. It really seems best to leave him here. Carita will see that he is happy.”

And Uncle Cliff had agreed.

Blue Bonnet spent a week end at Woodford to consult with Aunt Lucinda and Sarah Blake in regard to the plans. Woodford, just recovering from

the summer lethargy which hot weather invariably casts, looked cool and inviting, and Blue Bonnet found the old house restful. Her room was sweet and fresh, for already Delia had commenced the fall house-cleaning, and the view from the south window was as alluring as ever. Late coreopsis still bloomed in the garden, although the apple and cherry trees offered their soft carpets of beautiful and variegated leaves.

There were changes, however, and Blue Bonnet was not slow in discovering them.

"Does it seem to you that Denham is aging, Aunt Lucinda?" she asked, after the faithful old servant had brought her from the station, as on so many occasions.

"Yes, he is, Blue Bonnet. I have been trying to persuade him to get a boy to help him at the barn, but he dislikes the idea of giving up. I am considering turning the horses out to pasture and getting a runabout for my own use. Sarah thinks she could manage it."

"Of course she could!" Blue Bonnet exclaimed. "Nobody keeps horses these days. That would lighten Denham's cares greatly."

"Yes — but he would miss the horses. He has cared for them for so many years. Life holds so many problems." And for the first time since she could remember, Blue Bonnet heard Aunt Lucinda sigh.

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Sarah had fitted into the household as perfectly as if she had been born there, and Blue Bonnet could see how much her aunt depended on her for companionship.

"I am so thankful that Aunt Lucinda has Sarah," she said to Kitty Clark with whom she was spending an afternoon. "She is so much company, and they seem so companionable."

Kitty laughed as she tossed her sunny head.

"I should say they were. Sarah is going to be a perfect replica of your aunt. Have you noticed that she even talks like her? Why, when I call them over the telephone I can hardly tell which is speaking. And Sarah is getting an expression like Miss Clyde's. She has that same determined chin. Have you ever noticed it?"

Blue Bonnet confessed with some disdain that she had not.

"Oh, dear, Blue Bonnet, please don't be offended. I didn't mean to be rude. I admire a determined chin, *awfully*, everybody does. It denotes character. Nobody admires your aunt more than I do, but she is a — a typical *maiden lady*, isn't she?"

"I suppose she is. She's never been married."

"And Sarah never will be either."

"I don't see why you say that."

"Why, because, Blue Bonnet — did any of the boys ever pay her the least attention? Can you ever remember one of them taking her to a party?"

"If they didn't, they missed taking a mighty fine girl," Blue Bonnet declared. "And, anyway, what if she is an old maid? Matrimony isn't the chief and only aim of life. Maybe Sarah has a mission that would be very much hindered by marriage. I have myself. I doubt very much if *I* shall ever marry, with the settlement work I want to do, and —"

A merry peal of laughter greeted this remark.

"Oh, Blue Bonnet, that's *too* funny! *You* an old maid! I'd be willing to wager that you have ten chances before you're twenty. No, sirree! Some are *born* old maids, some *achieve* the position, and some have it thrust upon them. I'm afraid — awfully afraid that Sarah's going to have it thrust —"

"Kitty, I think that's unkind."

"Not at all, my dear. Didn't you just say that marriage wasn't the chief and only aim? It isn't. But let me tell you something: Sarah will never be a spinster. There's all the difference in the world between being a spinster and an old maid."

"What is the difference?"

"Well —" Kitty squinted her eyes toward the waning afternoon sun to collect her thoughts. "A spinster is sort of — *elected*, as they say in the Presbyterian church; *born one*, you know, it's fore-ordained. But an old maid, well, an old maid is the product of circumstances. Is that clear to you?"

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Often she might have married if she'd wished to; but the right man didn't come along, or she had a family to support, or the man she loved died, or she lost her health, or — oh, any number of things."

"But Sarah —"

"Sarah's the self-sacrificing kind. Sarah will wear a little halo round her head all through life. It'll shine so bright a man could see it a mile off. A halo stands for martyrdom, you know, and a man will steer clear of that, *believe me*. If there's anything doing in that line he'll get a monopoly on it himself!"

"Kitty, how absurd! You talk like a disappointed old woman. Where do you get such ideas?"

Kitty tapped her head significantly.

"They just come," she said. "Suppose we have a cup of tea and then run over to Amanda's. I think she'll be at home by this time. You know she's teaching."

"So Sarah told me. Does she like it?"

"Adores it. Of course she's only been at it five or six weeks, and the pay check every month is a great stimulus. She's bought some lovely things on the installment plan: a cedar chest and a mahogany bureau, and she's been pricing Oriental rugs. She wants to get a few if she can, because they say after this war is over they're going to be as scarce as hen's teeth."

“How much salary does she get?”

“Only sixty dollars a month, but, of course, she has no board to pay, and there isn’t much to spend money for in Woodford. I think she’s very sensible.”

“And Debby’s gone away to college! That surprised me more than anything I’ve heard in an age.”

“Yes, isn’t it too funny — little Deb, of all people! But ‘the race isn’t always to the swift’ as Father often says. Debby was slow as molasses in the grades, but she perked up wonderfully in high school, and I shouldn’t wonder if she weren’t a regular whiz in college. It often works that way.”

“And you, Kitty, what are you going to do?”

A little shadow fell across Kitty’s face.

“My duty is here, Blue Bonnet, at home. Mother is not nearly so well. The hot weather has been hard on her, and Father seems worried.”

Slowly the tears filled her eyes, and Blue Bonnet, always sympathetic, had her arms round her in a second.

“I am so sorry, Kitty. I do hope she will mend again. Could I see her for a minute? I wouldn’t stay long.”

“I was going to ask you to run up, Blue Bonnet. She has so often asked for you. I’ll see if she’s sleeping.”

A second later there was a call from the top of the stairs, and Blue Bonnet ran up softly.

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A white-capped nurse stood at the window pouring medicine from a bottle. The room had an atmosphere of suffering. Blue Bonnet felt it instantly. She slipped over to the bed quietly, and took one of the thin, pitifully wasted hands on the white coverlet in her own.

"It is I, Blue Bonnet Ashe, Mrs. Clark," she said timidly, as if a breath might disturb the wasted form. "Will you speak to me for a minute?"

The eyelids fluttered, opened, and the lips smiled.

"Dear Blue Bonnet," came a faint response. "Are you well?"

"Very well, Mrs. Clark." It seemed almost cruel to acknowledge it in the face of that suffering. "I hope you will be, too, when the winter sets in."

"I hope so, dear. It is hard on the family to see me in this condition."

Never a word as to her own discomfort. It was wonderful, Blue Bonnet thought, as she went back downstairs followed by Kitty. She could not trust herself to speak, and Kitty, seeing her emotion, wisely led her out into the dining-room and disappeared to make the tea.

Amanda was at home, and welcomed the girls with delight. "Suppose you come up to my room," she said, leading the way through the dark old-fashioned hall. "It's pleasanter up there, and Blue Bonnet hasn't seen it since it was papered."

Amanda's room was on the second floor at the

southeast corner: a good-sized, square room, with four large windows. Blue Bonnet paused at the door to admire the change that had been wrought.

"Oh, how lovely! You've had it all done over, haven't you, Amanda? I adore a yellow room — if it isn't too yellow, and this isn't."

The paper was charming, indeed: a pale yellow stripe, which the white ceiling and cream woodwork toned to a mellow softness. The bed — a wide old-fashioned one which Amanda hated — had been taken down, and in its place a couch stood; a couch comfortable and inviting with several cushions.

"You really like it?" Amanda asked hesitatingly. "It's so very simple after your lovely room, but it is restful and cozy, and I love that old avenue of elms through the south window."

"It's charming," Blue Bonnet said with genuine admiration. "And look at the new bureau! Dear me, what lugs!"

It was characteristic of Blue Bonnet to make people feel happy over their possessions, and Amanda's eyes followed hers with delight.

"Yes, I'm very proud of it. I've always wanted a good set. As soon as I can, I'm going to get the bed to go with it."

Blue Bonnet curled up on the couch, and Kitty took the rocking-chair which Amanda pulled up hospitably. Amanda dropped down on a low stool near Kitty and gave a little chuckle of delight.

"My, but it's good to see you once more, Blue Bonnet. It has been ages since we had a visit. Where's Sarah — why didn't she come with you?"

"She's making church calls with Aunt Lucinda this afternoon."

"I'm sorry. We might have had a meeting of the We Are Sevens — what's left of us. Of course you know about Debby?"

"Yes; isn't it splendid that she's to have so fine an education?"

"Lovely! But it seems too bad that she couldn't get it in Boston. You see, the uncle who is giving her these advantages lives in Wisconsin where this university is, and he wanted her to come there. She's going to live with her uncle and aunt, and go to school. They have no children and are so happy to have Debby."

"Do you think it matters a great deal where one gets an education, Amanda?"

"Why, of course!" Amanda said, her eyes opening wide in astonishment. "Don't you?"

"No, not much, so long as the college is reputable. After all, it's the student, not the college. I never thought much about it myself until Uncle Cliff and I were going through a wonderful university in the West, last summer, and in the library we saw this motto, carved where the students might often see it: 'The *jewel*, not the *casket*; the *light*, not the *lamp*!' I'm afraid Bostonians have a feeling that all the good

things of this earth are bounded by New England."

"I'm properly squelched, Blue Bonnet," Amanda said, laughing. "I always forget that you've only adopted us."

"You haven't noticed the Hope chest, Blue Bonnet," Kitty remarked.

"Yes, I have. I was just going to speak about it. It looks very suspicious, Amanda."

"Oh, no, Blue Bonnet, every girl has a Hope chest nowadays!" Amanda spoke positively, but she blushed to the roots of her dark hair.

Kitty pointed a threatening finger at her.

"I think you're horrid not to tell Blue Bonnet. If I were you I'd announce it in the newspaper."

"Yes, you would, Kitty."

"Announce what?" Blue Bonnet asked, bewildered.

Kitty reached down and pulled Amanda's retreating left hand into the light. On the third finger a little diamond sparkled.

"Why, Amanda Parker!" Blue Bonnet exclaimed. "The *idea* of your not telling me. What does it mean?"

"It means Amanda's engaged. Don't ever say I can't keep a secret. I've been dying to shout it from the house-tops ever since she got home, but she wouldn't let me."

"But wouldn't every one know — by the ring?"

"Oh, she wears it round her neck most of the

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time — modest little violet. Now, if it were mine, I'd have a hole cut in my glove to show it off, and hold on to the street car straps with my left hand. I believe she thinks it's paste, Blue Bonnet."

"Kitty! Stop teasing. You know better. It's only that — that — well, I'm going to marry a poor young doctor, Blue Bonnet, who's only just hung out his shingle, and it may be years before he can support a wife, and it seems so foolish to —"

"Advertise," Kitty broke in.

"Exactly — advertise the fact that I'm engaged."

"I don't see why," Blue Bonnet said. "May I see the ring?"

Amanda slipped off the little circlet and handed it to Blue Bonnet.

"It isn't very large — the stone isn't, but it's a very good diamond. Foster said it was the *bluest* one he could find in the store where he bought it, and, of course, I wouldn't have it any larger for anything. It would look so pretentious, and beyond Foster's means."

"Foster?" Blue Bonnet said inquiringly. "Foster who? Tell me all about him, Amanda. What's he like?"

Amanda went over to the bureau and brought forth a silver frame that held the photograph of a young man — a very good-looking young man, Blue Bonnet thought, as she took it for closer inspec-

tion. The eyes were clear and fine, the forehead broad and promising.

"His name is Foster Everett," Amanda said, less abashed now. "He's twenty-six and fair, and he was graduated from Johns Hopkins last year. I met him this summer; he was boarding with my aunt and we got to be good friends, and then — this happened. That's all there is to tell."

"Don't you believe her, Blue Bonnet. That isn't all, by half. He's specializing in eye and ear and throat diseases, and he's the most wonderful man in his line that the university has turned out in —"

But Amanda had closed Kitty's babbling little mouth with a very determined hand.

Blue Bonnet went over to the cedar chest and stood looking at it thoughtfully. When her surprise had vanished sufficiently to let her speak, she showered her good wishes on Amanda.

"May I see some of the pretty things in the chest?" she asked.

Amanda opened the lid. The tray was empty.

"There isn't a thing in it yet, Blue Bonnet. It all takes time, you see. I only bought the chest a few days ago."

Blue Bonnet turned suddenly.

"May I make the first contribution, Amanda? Please let me. I don't know what it will be. Is there anything you would particularly like? It

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seems so wonderful to think of one of the We Are Sevens being engaged."

"I should love anything you'd like to give me, I'm sure, Blue Bonnet. Only don't let it be too fine and elegant. Foster and I have an agreement that all our things shall be plain and simple, but substantial. We expect to be quite poor for awhile—until he gets a start. But I know he'll make good—he really is clever. Out of a class of ever so many he ranked way at the head, and he comes from a line of doctors. His father was one, and so was his grandfather. Can't you girls stay to tea?" Amanda broke off suddenly. "We have dinner at noon because Father prefers it, but Mother baked this morning, and I can give you some fresh rolls and cake. We'd just love to have you."

Kitty looked wistful.

"It sounds mighty good, Amanda, but I must run along. I want to sit with Mother while the nurse goes out for a walk. You stay, Blue Bonnet. I can recommend the rolls and cake. I know them of old."

There was no reason why Blue Bonnet should not stay, and she accepted the immaculate white apron that Amanda provided, and went with her to the kitchen to get things ready.

"Mother went to the Ladies' Aid this afternoon and I told her not to hurry back," Amanda said.

"I don't know what she was going to have for tea,

but I'm sure we can find something. Wouldn't you rather sit down and look at a book or a magazine, Blue Bonnet? I can do this in a jiffy."

"I'm going to stay right here and help," Blue Bonnet answered from the pantry, where she was busy looking for the dishes. "I'm going to set the table. Do you still use the blue dishes every day?"

"Yes, and they are in the same old place — trust Mother for that! She's as methodical as ever. The silver's in the sideboard, and you'll find some doilies there, too. We don't spread a cloth for tea. You see I refuse to make company of you."

The fire was soon blazing in the kitchen range and the kettle singing merrily. Blue Bonnet hummed a little tune as she set the table. It was so good to be with old friends, and she loved the simple home duties.

Amanda made several trips to the cellar, returning with the most delectable looking preserves and jam, golden cream and fresh butter. Then she broke some eggs into an old-fashioned blue bowl, and made ready to prepare an omelet.

"Mr. Foster Everett is going to get a gem of a wife," Blue Bonnet remarked as she watched the skilled fingers daintily separating the eggs. "You always could cook, couldn't you, Amanda?"

"Yes, I've always had to, more or less. Mother never would bother with a maid. I wish Kitty

might have stayed. Poor Kitty, I'm afraid there's a great sorrow in store for her."

"You mean her mother? Is she so very much worse, Amanda?"

"Oh, yes. She has failed terribly this summer, and the Doctor is grieved to death. You know he simply adores her, for all she's been an invalid so long. He's aged awfully under the strain. His hair is as white as snow."

"I'm so sorry."

"But it has brought Kitty out wonderfully. Everybody speaks of it. She has taken nearly all the care of her mother for several months, scarcely leaving her a minute. Of course she's so low now she has to have a trained nurse. The end may come at any time.

"But Kitty's a regular brick," Amanda went on. "She'll keep up for her father's sake. Did you ever notice how those little, saucy, flyaway people settle down in emergencies? Kitty still says sharp things, but her heart's in the right place. She's a dear."

"She always was," Blue Bonnet affirmed.

The next hour sped on wings. There was so much to discuss after months of absence: good old times when the We Are Sevens had no cares and every day was a play day. It was "Do you remember this, Blue Bonnet?" and "Oh, but wasn't that a lark, Amanda?" The harmless gossip of

Woodford was retained for Blue Bonnet's benefit. The new minister who had taken Mr. Blake's place was very well liked, only some thought him rather young, and that a married man would have been better. A few old settlers had died, some of the younger ones married. The General's health had been so poor that he had gone to Florida for the winter. Alec was doing splendidly at West Point.

"He's going to have his first leave of absence at Christmas and is coming to Woodford," Blue Bonnet remarked. His letters to her were not so frequent as of old, but they still came and were long and newsy.

It was nine o'clock when Amanda and her father left Blue Bonnet at her aunt's door. The visit had been delightful and the girls still lingered on the veranda, loath to part.

"I won't forget the Hope chest," Blue Bonnet said when Amanda at last tore herself away. "I'm going shopping the first thing Monday morning, and you may expect a package not later than Wednesday. Good night. Give my regards to Mr. Foster Everett when you write, and tell him I think he's drawing a prize."

She disappeared at last through the wide old-fashioned door which Delia held open invitingly.

CHAPTER III

BLUE BONNET IS WORRIED

DINNER was over. Hester was removing the last of the coffee service from before the grate fire, and John Churchill had the mahogany tables gathered and ready to nest.

"Am I to be repaid for this labor with a one-step?" he asked Blue Bonnet.

"If you call it labor. I call it opportunity," she answered with a smile. "It isn't every man who can invite himself to dinner and then have the privilege of setting the house to rights. I'm sure Uncle Cliff is pining for a fox-trot."

Knight and John had dropped in for a late afternoon call, and John, now a frequent visitor, had boldly suggested that it would be delightful to remain for dinner and enjoy a little dancing afterward.

"You're quite welcome," Blue Bonnet said with her usual hospitality. "I'll just run and tell Nora, so she can set the extra places. But I warn you — you're to take pot luck. I reckon what's good enough for us every day is good enough for com-

pany once in a while. That's what Benita used to say at the ranch."

"Good for Benita!"

John Churchill had long since lost all traces of formality when he visited Blue Bonnet. Frequent week-ends at the sea-shore during the summer had put them on the friendliest basis, and it always gave her the greatest pleasure to see him moving about in his old home, happy and content.

He put the tables away in the dining-room while Knight turned back the rugs for dancing.

"Give us 'Araby,' will you, please?" he called to Carita, who was attending to the Victrola.

Carita nodded, and the next instant he had whirled Blue Bonnet off in a dance that resembled a delightful romp.

Mr. Ashe and Knight both bowed elaborately before Mrs. White, but Knight made way for the elder man.

Mr. Ashe's dancing had begun in a joke, and developed into a mild passion. Blue Bonnet had insisted that everybody in Boston was dancing, young and old, and that he must learn.

"Honey, I'm too old and stiff," he complained, but after much coaxing she got him up on the floor one night and put him through some paces. The next evening, much to her amusement as well as delight, he said:

"How was it that fool step went, Honey? Not

that I'm anxious to take up dancing at my age, but I don't like to let anything get the best of me."

Again she had shown him, patiently and painstakingly. Each succeeding evening found her "polishing him off," to use her own expression, until the exercise became a very delightful habit.

"'Fess up, Uncle Cliff," she demanded when he had become quite expert, and could lead off in several of the new dances with the abandon of a boy, "'fess up that you're quite crazy about dancing, and that it is making you young again."

"There isn't any doubt about it, Blue Bonnet. It has put the clock back ten years."

Mrs. White had also learned the new dances. It had been very easy for her as she had always been an excellent dancer.

"Isn't Mrs. White pretty to-night?" Blue Bonnet asked as she and John paused for breath. "She's getting younger every minute, and so is Uncle Cliff."

John's eyes followed Blue Bonnet's.

Mrs. White and Mr. Ashe were standing by the mantel where they had also paused to rest. Mrs. White was looking up into his face with interest and animation. She was wearing a soft blue crêpe gown, cut low in the neck, and her face, flushed with exercise, was like that of a girl's.

"I should think that your Uncle might al-

most —” John did not finish the sentence. He paused awkwardly.

“ Might what? ”

“ Fall victim to her charms,” he went on hesitatingly — “ she is so attractive, so kind and gracious.”

Blue Bonnet’s glance fell, and a little pain went through her heart. The same thought had crept into her own mind of late, but she had steeled herself against it. Uncle Cliff’s affection was hers — *hers alone*; that was something she could not share.

Knight’s voice saying, “ May I have this hesitation? ” sounded odd and far away, but she put her arm on his shoulder rather gladly and left John wishing he had kept his errant thoughts to himself.

She was hardly herself the rest of the evening. After Mrs. White had gone upstairs, and Mr. Ashe and Knight into the den to smoke — Carita and Gabriel had disappeared early because of lessons — she sat down listlessly by the wide library table, and pulling the light nearer, took up her embroidery.

“ May I help you? ” John said, adjusting the shade to the proper angle. “ Is that right? ”

“ Yes; thank you.”

“ May I inquire what you are making? ”

“ Some doilies.”

“ I didn’t know that you cared for hand work.”

“ I don’t — I hate it! ”

There was silence for a moment.

“ You seem to be doing beautifully, nevertheless.”

"No; I'm not. They're horrid. It will take every ounce of Amanda's affection for me to use them."

"Why didn't you get Miss Blake to do them? She seems so expert."

"Because I wanted to do them myself. I'm tired of *buying* things for people. Anybody can *buy* things."

She held the little hoop, with its scrap of linen fastened securely, off at arm's length to view her progress.

John flicked the ashes from a half finished cigar and rose.

"I think I must be going," he said; "I am sure you must be very tired. I—"

The words stopped suddenly, something checked them. Two bright tears had gathered in Blue Bonnet's eyes and rolled down her cheeks.

John was back in his chair instantly. He reached over and took Blue Bonnet's hand which lay idle in her lap, and held it warmly.

"Blue Bonnet," he said, and his voice betrayed his annoyance, "what a brute I am. It's what I said about—about your Uncle and Mrs. White that is worrying you, isn't it? I don't know why I said it. There's nothing to it—not a thing!"

Blue Bonnet gave an anxious glance toward the den. Some one had closed the door.

"You needn't feel that way about it," she took

up her sewing again; "I, too, had thought the same thing. She is attractive — and sweet. Any man could love her — but it mustn't be Uncle Cliff. He's *mine* — all I've got in the world! He's father, mother, sister, and brother — *everything* — I couldn't give him up to anybody. It would kill me."

"You will never have to, I'm sure."

"But if he should grow to care — to like her — that way, you know, I couldn't interfere. It would be too horribly selfish. He has a right to fall in love if he wants to, of course, and —"

The tears were coming thick and fast now, though Blue Bonnet struggled heroically to check them.

John was distracted.

"Oh, come, Blue Bonnet," he said, "don't, please! Why, it's all your imagination anyway. It's preposterous!"

"You suggested it, you thought of it."

"Yes, but it was just an impulse, just — she looked so deucedly attractive as she stood there smiling up —" He stopped suddenly, realizing he was making a bad matter worse.

"She's always attractive. She's a perfect dear. I quite adore her — as a friend, but not as — a relation."

John rose and began to pace the floor, his hands thrust deep in his trousers pocket.

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“Would you go to a movie with me?” he asked, wheeling as he looked at his watch. “The fresh air would do you good. It isn’t so very late.”

“Not to-night, thank you. I’ve been shopping to-day. I am tired.”

John dropped back into the chair and strove to make conversation. He couldn’t leave until she had smiled.

“Shopping! That’s interesting. I didn’t suppose there was anything left to buy. Aren’t you nearly ready for the trip?”

“Yes — I was buying things for a trousseau this morning.”

John gave a start.

“A trousseau! May I inquire who the fortunate person is?”

“Of course; it’s Amanda Parker. She’s one of the We Are Sevens at Woodford. You don’t know her. She was away all last winter visiting an aunt in New York — that’s where she met the young man, the one she’s going to marry.”

“Oh, I see. And what did you buy — something very pretty?”

“Just linen; a tablecloth and some napkins. I am going to have Sarah mark them. I’d love to do it myself, but Amanda wouldn’t be able to use them if I did.”

“You are very fortunate to be able to do so much for your friends, Blue Bonnet.”

"Yes — I suppose I am, that's true. And I'm glad, of course."

"It's a wonderful thing to be able to gratify every wish."

"Yes; but Miss North used to say that it was just as fine a thing to have the *desire* to do a kindness as to *gratify* that desire. Otherwise only the rich would have the pleasure of giving. Don't you see — it isn't the *actual giving* that counts. It's the motive that prompts it. That's why I'm so anxious to *make* something for Amanda. It represents more love." She was smiling now.

"Then you believe that 'it is not so much what man *does* as what man *would* do' that exalts him?"

"Exactly; Browning understood."

"Did he say that?"

"Yes — in 'Saul,' you remember."

John Churchill, himself a student, loved to draw Blue Bonnet out. Her intellect was opening and expanding these days as a flower to the sun.

"You are very young to care so much for poetry."

"Oh, I don't know. Gabriel adores it. I read a little of Field and Riley to him every night."

As always, when Gabriel's name was mentioned John's eyes grew tender.

"How he's growing," he remarked. "He's quite keen for those Saturday excursions we have."

"Yes; he adores them. Sometimes I'm quite jealous."

"Why won't you come with us?"

"Oh, I'm busy. And then I think you ought to be alone with Gabriel. You have the first right. You're his uncle."

"And you're his angel — his good angel!"

"He's very much interested in a little girl who goes to dancing school and wears a pink dress."

"So he told me, but I think it's the dress."

"He has a passion for pink."

"I've been trying to get the psychology of that. His mother had the same passion. She loved color. She was like a little Indian when she was a child — always wanted all sorts of beads and gimcracks."

"I'm afraid she had very few of them in her last days," Blue Bonnet said wistfully. "Does Gabriel ever tell you anything about her?"

"Occasionally, but he's wary; he's willing to give a limited amount of information on his own account, but if you question him it's all off."

"Do you think he has the slightest suspicion that you are his uncle?"

"I don't know, I'm sure. He sees a good deal of Toppin."

"Oh, Toppin's as close as the grave. She wouldn't tell him."

"Sometimes I think we should."

"Why, Blue Bonnet? He belongs to you."

“Yes; it was splendid of you to let me adopt him, but still, ‘blood is thicker than water,’ you know. You have the moral right, after all.”

There was a pause in the conversation. Evidently there was something John wanted to say, but he checked the impulse. It was just as well, for at that instant Knight came out of the den followed by Mr. Ashe. They both looked as if they had enjoyed a good visit.

A little later, when her guests had gone, Blue Bonnet went into the den to give her uncle a good-night kiss. She perched on the arm of his chair for a minute and ran her hand over his shoulder caressingly.

“Going to bed, Honey?”

“I think so, Uncle Cliff.”

“Had a happy day?”

“Very; I got the linen for Amanda. I’m sure she’ll like it. It’s lovely!”

“Are you too tired to talk with me for a little while, Honey? There is something I very much want to say to you — something that is on my mind. I hope you will see the situation as I do, and consent to what I believe will give us all a good deal of happiness. Sit down, will you?”

Blue Bonnet hardly knew how she got across the room to the chair opposite her uncle. She knew that every vestige of color left her face, and it seemed as if her heart stopped beating, but she managed to stammer:

"Certainly, Uncle Cliff. If you *must* tell me to-night. It isn't anything that would keep until to-morrow?"

"I'd rather tell you to-night, Honey. It's important — to *two persons*, at least. It means so much to me — and will to you, too."

"All right, Uncle Cliff — go ahead — I'm listening."

The words were barely audible, and Mr. Ashe glanced across at Blue Bonnet quickly. He took a second glance, and then evidently feeling that he was mistaken in fancying anything unusual in her appearance, began.

"As I said, Honey, this question I want to discuss with you is important, and has been on my mind for several months, at least —"

Blue Bonnet moved restlessly in her chair.

"What's the matter? Aren't you comfortable? Sit here."

He made the couch cozy with cushions and insisted on her moving.

"And I want to settle it one way or the other as quickly as possible. It's about our future, Honey, — yours and mine. I want to make a change. I'm getting along in years, Blue Bonnet. There's no denying the fact, for all I'm fox-trotting and one-stepping; and I've about made up my mind to ease up a little, shed responsibility — take what happiness and pleasure comes my way. I've worked hard and long in my time."

"I know it, Uncle Cliff." The voice was still far away, indistinct.

"I'm hankerin' a little after the flesh pots, I reckon."

He leaned over and took a fresh cigar from a jar on the table and lighted it deliberately; so deliberately that Blue Bonnet thought she should scream if he didn't finish quickly.

"Yes, Uncle Cliff, and this change, what is it? Could you tell me, please. I *am* just a little tired to-night."

Mr. Ashe settled back in his chair and looked at her through a mist of smoke.

"I think I've found the man to take Uncle Joe's place on the ranch," he announced triumphantly. "It's Knight. But he's got to know definitely right away, for he has several irons in the fire."

Blue Bonnet sank back among the cushions and turned her face to the wall.

"Think he's too young, do you?" Mr. Ashe said, noting the movement. "Well, I thought so too at first, but I've changed my mind. That young man has a future. He's all business, Honey — keen for it, and he knows the lay of the land down there better than anybody I can put my hands on. I think he'd get on with Joe, too. He's tactful. Wouldn't be a bad start for him, either. We could afford to make it pay him."

Blue Bonnet rose, shook the couch pillows and

put them back against the wall neatly before she replied :

“ Whatever suits you, suits me, Uncle Cliff, you know that. I’m very fond of Knight, and would be only too glad to see him succeed anywhere. Let us try him by all means.”

“ All right, Honey, I’ll let him know in the morning. If I can break him in to the needs of the ranch it means that I can give up business — at least for awhile. I rather crave the rest.”

“ You meant then that it was important to you — and to Knight, when you spoke of — of the matter a few minutes ago? ”

“ Certainly; and to you, too. Knight can grow up with the business as I did, and relieve you of many cares in the future.”

“ Yes — that will be splendid, Uncle Cliff.” She stooped for the good-night kiss, but raised her face suddenly.

“ Uncle Cliff ”— Blue Bonnet always plunged into things, it was not a part of her nature to weigh matters — “ do you remember my asking you last spring why you never married — and if you thought you ever would? ”

“ No; I don’t remember that you did, Honey. Why? ”

“ Because — I get to thinking about it sometimes and it worries me — the thought that you might marry, you know. It’s selfish, so horribly selfish

that I'm ashamed, because if you wanted to marry of course you should, you —"

She didn't finish the sentence, and Mr. Ashe gently drew her into his arms.

"I'll make a bargain with you, Honey," he said, "right now," and the thought seemed to please him. "I'll promise never to marry until you do. How's that? Safe, do you think?"

"Perfectly," she answered, "because *I never* shall. I couldn't with my settlement house and all the things I want to accomplish. And you'll be quite happy — satisfied with just me to look after you?"

"Quite happy, Blue Bonnet." He threw back his head and laughed.

"You're sure you — you don't want to marry?"

"Absolutely."

A little trembling sigh escaped Blue Bonnet — a sigh of joy and triumph. She bent down for the kiss and smiled.

"You're such a dear, Uncle Cliff, such a dear! You're my father, mother, uncle — all in one! I couldn't share you with any one."

She darted away before he had time to reply, but he sat smoking long after she left the room, a tender light glowing in his eyes, a light that had come there with her birth and would last through all eternity.

CHAPTER IV

COUSIN HONORA'S TREASURES

THERE is always a pleasurable excitement about a journey, whether it is to be one of fifty miles or many thousands.

For several weeks Blue Bonnet's household held an atmosphere of delightful anticipation. Plans were in the air. They were discussed at breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Blue Bonnet was busy with engagements: engagements at the tailor's, the milliner's, the architect's; the plans for the Home had to be altered from time to time to meet new ideas and demands.

"I don't know how we are ever going to get away next week," she said one morning to Mrs. White, and her face was anxious. "I simply have to spend a great deal of time with Mr. Feganza going over the plans, and there are all of Gabriel's clothes to see to — he will need so many while I'm away. Goldecini hasn't sent home one of my tailor gowns yet, and I don't suppose he will until the last minute, so there's that to worry about."

Mrs. White traced a line that was beginning to

leave its mark on Blue Bonnet's forehead, with a caressing finger.

"Let me finish Gabriel's shopping," she said considerably. "I am sure I can attend to it satisfactorily, and I will have an interview with Goldecini."

"Oh, would you, Mrs. White? I should be so grateful. John and I want to go over to the Home this afternoon, there are so many directions I have to give the contractor."

"Has Mr. Churchill made up his mind to go with us?"

"Didn't I tell you? Yes, he has at last arranged for three weeks' vacation. The case he's so interested in is set for the second week in December. Of course he can't go on to the ranch with us, but it will be something to have him at the Exposition."

"And Knight goes also?"

"Yes; Uncle Cliff insisted on his having a vacation before he takes up his duties at the ranch. He'll be buried there for some time, you know."

"Buried?"

"Not exactly buried - - that sounds more disloyal than it really is. I only mean that he will see so few people, and it will be more or less lonely after city life. But he likes it; he's perfectly crazy over what he calls his big opportunity. Knight's a love!"

The statement might have been a little startling to any one but Mrs. White, who knew that Blue Bonnet had come to look upon the young man as a member of the family, almost a brother. It was Knight to whom she turned in emergency, of whom she asked a favor. To Knight she went with her little secrets and difficulties.

"He's so understanding," she sometimes said to John, who would have been glad to render the same services. "I suppose it is because he's lived in the West so much. There's something fine and big and splendid about him; as if the breadth and length and open spaces had become a part of him. Knight's absolutely free from pettiness."

"And do those attributes belong only to the West?" John would ask, and Blue Bonnet would nod saucily.

"Eastern men are so self-centered and hemmed about by tradition — *most* of them," she amended, and flashed a smile that meant he was exempt. "They're afraid of being themselves because — because they might break a rule observed by their ancestors."

Once John had asked for an example of his countrymen's shortcomings and she had answered complacently:

"Oh, dear, there are so many. For instance, a man in Boston breaks his neck to get on his feet when a lady enters the drawing-room and stands

when you'd just as soon he'd sit, but he lets her hang on to a strap in the street car until she's ready to drop. Can you imagine Uncle Cliff or Knight letting a woman stand — *any woman* — anywhere!"

"Neither would any gentleman."

"Well, I don't know how you're going to distinguish. These men wear good clothes and move in the best circles. But we like you just the same," she would add in the next breath. "We like to be seen with you because you're such a finished product. You have such a nice accent, and you wear your clothes beautifully, and do things in the most approved fashion."

"We're everything but *men*, then?"

"Oh, you're *charming men*."

"Without the fundamentals — merely the veneer!"

"I didn't say that."

"You intimated it."

Then Blue Bonnet, with all her woman's wonder and surprise, would open her eyes to the widest capacity and exclaim:

"How can you say such a thing! I'm sure I never even suggested it."

Not for worlds would she have let him know how much she did admire him. How often in the tenement she had turned her head to hide the tears as he lifted a suffering child in his arms, or assisted a

woman in distress, dismissing her gratitude with an invitation to "forget it."

But still she teased, tantalized.

"You've never been West, have you?" she said only the night before when he told her he could join the party.

"No; unfortunately."

"You have something to live for. You don't know what real hospitality is until you've been South or West."

"I've known yours," he replied gallantly.

"Oh, mine isn't in it — you have to stay days and days with people: live in their houses and see their homes. People will ask you to visit them when you've scarcely known them a week, sometimes."

John's slight shrug spoke volumes.

"I shouldn't care to be under obligations to people I knew so slightly."

"That's just it — that's your New England training! You're not adaptable. We like to be friends with everybody."

"I see — sort of a brotherhood of man affair."

"If you like to put it that way — yes."

Blue Bonnet smiled, and John went away laughing. There was something about Blue Bonnet's smile that took the edge off of every sting.

She stopped long enough this morning to give a few instructions to Fräulein, and have a word with Mrs. White.

"I shan't be at home for lunch," she said as she slipped the unfinished doilies into her bag. "I have promised to have a bite with Cousin Honora. I'm going to sit with her while Cousin Augusta does some shopping. John's going to call for me at four."

She went downstairs quickly, stopping at the door of the den to see if Uncle Cliff were there. He was just going out, so together they went down the street.

"You've finished all the arrangements, I suppose," she said as they paused at the curb: he had refused her lift in the electric, preferring to walk.

"Yes; everything, even to the car."

"Not the Wanderer, I suppose?"

"No; the Sunset, this time. She's headed straight for the Golden West."

"I almost wish we weren't going to have a private car, Uncle Cliff," Blue Bonnet said, halting with hand on the door of her coupé. "I love to be with the crowd."

"You'll get enough of crowds at the Exposition, Honey."

"I reckon so."

She stood watching him as he went down the street, tall and erect, scarcely showing the forty-seven years which he carried lightly. Knight had called him a "prince." She thought him a king among men — even in his bearing.

Cousin Honora had not been well for some time, the result of a summer cold which clung persistently. Blue Bonnet found her in the library before a cheerful log fire, trying to knit.

"You're ever so much better, aren't you, Cousin Honora?" she said with delight, noting the hand work.

"I'm gaining," was the comforting reply. "I cannot afford to be idle any longer. I thought I'd lay in a supply of mittens for your children at the Home. I've never made mittens before, but they are really very simple."

Blue Bonnet drew up a small rocking-chair, and, taking her work from the bag, settled down for a good visit. She was very fond of Cousin Honora, who was several years younger than Cousin Augusta and seemed less formidable. She was what Kitty described as an old maid; but Cousin Augusta was certainly a spinster. Cousin Honora might have been married — indeed Blue Bonnet often wondered how she had escaped, she was so feminine and sweet.

Blue Bonnet stitched away on the doilies. Timothy, the maltese house cat, dozed on the hearth rug and the grandfather's clock in the corner ticked away pleasantly.

"Embroidering, Blue Bonnet?" Cousin Honora asked, surprised. "I thought you disliked it."

"I'm not just crazy about it, Cousin Honora, but

one of my friends in Woodford is engaged and I'm making this for her wedding chest."

A flicker of interest passed over Cousin Honora's face.

"A chest is always a source of interest to a girl," she said. Blue Bonnet thought she was going to say something more, but her lips closed suddenly.

"Yes — I suppose so; every girl wants one whether she's going to be married or not. There's a sentiment about it."

Cousin Honora was silent.

Blue Bonnet took her stitches daintily, holding her work off now and then to get the effect of her work.

"I read such a beautiful story last winter in one of the magazines about a wedding chest — the girl called it her Glory-Box. It wasn't a very elaborate one, just a pine box covered with cretonne, but she made it serve the purpose beautifully."

Cousin Honora seemed interested.

"But the girl never got to enjoy the pretty things she made — that is with her sweetheart, for he died very suddenly of pneumonia. It was a wonderful story, so simple and sweet. You could just *see* the Glory-Box, and the pretty garments which she kept wrapped in blue paper so they would stay white; awfully plain things, but so dainty with feather-stitching and hand embroidery."

"And she never had a chance to wear the

things?" There was a pathetic droop to Cousin Honora's tones.

"Oh, yes, that was the pathetic part of the story. You see, she was such a fine girl — so big and brave — that after awhile, when the first great grief had passed away, she began to think of those about her — of her mother who had always toiled and skimped and saved: and one day a friend of the young man she was to have married — a lovely woman — came from another State to see her, and they didn't have things that were quite good enough for the table — that is, for a stranger, so she went to the Glory-Box and got out her prettiest linen, the fine tablecloth and napkins that her mother had sacrificed so much to buy for her, and the doilies, and then she dressed in some of the pretty things, because she felt that *somehow*, *he* would know, and be proud of her. Oh, she was wonderful! It made you better just to read of her."

"And then what happened?" Cousin Honora asked, as eager for the story as a girl might have been.

"Nothing; except that you felt her sweetness and bravery in every line. Felt that she'd make the best of everything all through life — be a tower of strength to others in sorrow. You *knew* her, just as well as if you'd seen her and taken her by the hand and talked with her for hours. She lived."

Silence fell between them. Blue Bonnet was so

intent on the doilies that she did not see Cousin Honora's eyes fixed on her dreamily. It was Cousin Honora who spoke finally.

"Would you like a Glory-Box, Blue Bonnet? If you would, there is one up-attic." Cousin Honora always said up-attic.

"A Glory-Box! To whom does it belong?"

"To me, dear. But I was neither as brave as the girl in the story, nor as unselfish. It is still full of finery, but the things are yellow with age."

Blue Bonnet dropped her work in her lap and stared at Cousin Honora in amazement.

"You — were engaged once, Cousin Honora?"

"Yes, Blue Bonnet."

"And why were you never married?"

"The young man went away to war. He — never — came back."

"He was injured — died?"

"Yes."

"Oh, Cousin Honora, how dreadful! I am so sorry. What a difference it must have made in your life."

But Cousin Honora scarcely heard. She was gazing through the window, out over the view Blue Bonnet loved so well.

After a moment Blue Bonnet spoke.

"But how *could* you give the chest away? It must be a treasure."

"Why should I keep it? I have been very self-

ish as it is. There were any number of my friends who would have been happy to have it. Would you like to see it, Blue Bonnet? It hasn't been opened since — since I heard the news of his death. It was all filled then, and ready for my wedding. I think — I almost believe — that I should like to open it now. Suppose we go up-attic and see what condition the things are in."

"Oh, Cousin Honora, I don't believe you are able. It's cold up in the attic. I'm afraid Cousin Augusta wouldn't like it."

A look of disappointment passed over Cousin Honora's face, but she answered cheerfully:

"I dare say you are right, but you may go, Blue Bonnet. I think there is just about time before lunch." She rang a bell close to her chair and Andrews entered.

"My keys, Andrews; tell Hannah she will find them in the right-hand drawer of my bureau."

"There," she said, when Andrews returned, "I believe this is the one, but I can't be sure. It has been so long since I thought of using it." She selected a key and handed the ring to Blue Bonnet.

"But, Cousin Honora, you are quite sure you want me to go rummaging through your things. I don't like to — alone."

"Quite sure. And if there is anything you think **you** could use, take it. Everything is very old-fashioned."

Blue Bonnet had no difficulty in locating the chest. It stood in a corner aloof and sacred. It had none of the ostentatious elegance of Annabel's chest. There were no carved feet protruding proudly; but it was large and beautiful nevertheless: square and deep, and as Blue Bonnet threw back the top the old wood and lavender gave forth a faint decaying fragrance.

She lifted the first layer of paper and took out two or three pieces of linen tenderly. They were carefully wrapped in blue paper and tied with white ribbon. She held them in her hands for a moment almost dreading to open them. When she did find courage she was mystified, and then amused. A little bundle of caps met her vision. Not the ribbon and lace boudoir caps of her own generation, but the daintiest, simplest, most absurd looking little wisps of linen imaginable.

"Oh, I know," she said half aloud, after she had turned them over in her hands several times and inspected the tiny stitches which had been taken so carefully by hand, "they're night caps — of course! I've heard Grandmother tell about them. How funny!" She laughed as she laid them away again in the blue paper.

It was underwear that next met her eyes: not the dainty cobwebby stuff that had been so conspicuous in Annabel's trousseau, but finely woven linen with the most fascinating eyelet embroidery and real

lace. The pieces were yellow, despite the blue paper, but they were in perfect condition. Blue Bonnet lingered over them tenderly.

Under the tray reposed the linen; quantities of it. Hand-embroidered pillow-cases, sheets with the most wonderful lace insertions and drawn work; tablecloths that were visions of elegance; napkins that would have made two of those of the present day, but all so pathetically, so pitifully yellow and unused.

"I almost think Cousin Honora *was* selfish to let these beautiful things go to waste," Blue Bonnet thought, "but perhaps she just couldn't give them away; and, of course, it would have been hard to use them."

She went down deeper into the chest — it really seemed to have no bottom — and brought out more bed coverings; hand stitched counterpanes and knitted coverlets; pieced quilts over which roses and tulips, daisies and other flowers ran riotously. And the towels! Not the towels of to-day, pretentious, impracticable, with borders of hand wrought forget-me-nots and intricate designs, but towels made for every day use; large, soft, and sensible, with deep hemstitched ends or knotted fringe.

There were quaint little dressing sacks, too, with wide flowing sleeves and fringed ruffles; party slippers and silken hose. Blue Bonnet could not help smiling as she inspected the slippers. The toes were

wide and the heels flat — just such slippers as little girls wear nowadays and call Mary Janes, only these were of the very finest white and gray kid. Some had straps that held ribbon which was to be crossed and tied above the ankle.

“I suppose that was the very latest word in fashion,” Blue Bonnet thought as she put them back. “Cousin Honora would have adored wearing them.”

She took a white gauze ribbon — such a queer ribbon — from around another package, and a bundle of handkerchiefs scattered in her lap. Such beautiful handkerchiefs! They were so sheer and fine that the whole bunch might have been drawn through a finger ring; and the tiny initials that reposed in the corners would have put even Sarah Blake's exquisite needlework to shame.

And near the handkerchiefs were charming hand-embroidered collars with scalloped edges and wreaths of tiny flowers — so tiny that Blue Bonnet marveled at the stitches and designs. There were kerchiefs, too, soft ruffy ones made of fine linen and lawn, with little rolled hems used so much in Grandmother's day. Blue Bonnet recalled how her Grandmother Clyde had once tried to teach her to roll and sew a hem, but had given up in despair.

Under the second tray lay the dresses — several of them. Blue Bonnet took out a soft gray silk glimmering with pink lights, and it flashed over her that it was what Grandmother had once described

as ashes of rose. But it was the soft blue brocaded satin with the full blown pink roses twisting and turning in the design that held her entranced. She shook it out tenderly, and held it up to her own waist. The bodice was cut low, away from the shoulders, and the sleeves were mere suggestions. A bertha of real lace finished the neck. Blue Bonnet felt sure that the lace had been brought from a foreign shore — perhaps by Cousin Honora's father, who was a sea captain.

"This was her very best evening gown, I'm sure," Blue Bonnet thought as she folded it away carefully; "and this"—she took out a lavender satin with a broad purple stripe—"was her second-day dress. They always dressed up the second day to receive their friends"—she had heard Grandmother tell about that, too.

"Cousin Honora must have been a picture in these gowns." The words escaped Blue Bonnet and echoed strangely through the deserted attic. "She must have been a love in the blue brocade, with her dark eyes and fair complexion. I can just see her! the lace fastened at her throat with a big round broach that held a lock of her sweetheart's hair. Oh, dear, why did he have to go away and die!"

One by one she folded away the gowns and straightened the linen, took another look at the little caps, and, locking the chest, went downstairs soberly. She almost dreaded to meet Cousin

Honora's glance, for she felt as if she had been allowed a peep into a sanctuary too sacred for strange eyes.

She was glad to find that Cousin Augusta had arrived, and awaited an opportunity to speak with Cousin Honora alone. When it came, she slipped the keys into her hand and thanked her for the privilege of looking at the lovely things.

"Were they in good condition?" Cousin Honora questioned, and Blue Bonnet nodded, for Cousin Augusta was coming back into the room. "And would you like to have the chest?"

"I would adore it," Blue Bonnet whispered, and followed the elderly ladies in to lunch.

Cousin Honora spoke of the chest again just as she was leaving and said that she would have it sent over soon.

Blue Bonnet was late in arriving home, but late as it was she could not refrain from opening a letter which lay on her desk from Amanda. She was eager to know how she liked the linen. But the smile of anticipation vanished when she read the first lines:

"BLUE BONNET DEAR:

"I am sorry to be the bearer of bad news, but you will want to know: Mrs. Clark died last evening. She went sweetly and peacefully, just

as she had always lived, and while we mourn her, and shall miss her sorely, we feel that she has earned a beautiful rest. Kitty is simply wonderful. She has taken complete charge of everything, because her father is so undone. We marvel at her strength and courage. If you can come down to the funeral, which will be day after tomorrow at three in the afternoon, I know she will appreciate it.

“It hardly seems a fitting time to speak of the linen. May I just say it is so exquisite and beautiful that I can hardly realize it is mine. I will thank you and tell you how much I love you when I see you.

“As always,

“AMANDA.”

CHAPTER V

SAN FRANCISCO

DIRECTLY across the street from Blue Bonnet's home, in a house that was noted for its beauty as well as simple elegance, dwelt Judge and Mrs. Fenwick Howell. The Howells were old friends of John Churchill's, and out of that friendship ripened Blue Bonnet's.

Judge and Mrs. Howell had two children: Frances, known to her friends as Fanny, and Jim, who was three years his sister's senior. The position of the family in Boston was one to be envied, for the Judge had long sat on the Federal bench and this honor, added to the fact that he had large means, gave them *entre* into the most exclusive circles.

Fanny was nearly two years older than Blue Bonnet, and had been formally presented to her mother's friends, but she was a girl who cared very little for society, and never troubled her head about festivities. This was something of a trial to Mrs. Howell, who rather inclined to the frivolous side of life.

"Fanny's a brick," was John's recommendation

to Blue Bonnet when he introduced her. "She will fall in with all your settlement schemes, and lead you on to heaven knows where!" Which proved true so far as being a brick went. A summer spent together by the sea — the cottages of the two families were close — cemented a friendship that began at introduction, and after nearly five months had grown to be a delight to both.

In fact, the family across the street had adopted Blue Bonnet. Even Jim, world wise and a trifle blasé, took a keen interest in her. The Judge was very fond of her, and Mrs. Howell could scarcely wait for the day when she could present Blue Bonnet to Boston society.

"Remember," she was saying this morning — Blue Bonnet had run across the street for her last good-bys — "you are not to stay a minute longer than the first of January at that beloved ranch of yours. I have planned your coming-out party for about the twentieth, and shall engage the flowers and the caterer."

"Poor Blue Bonnet!" Fanny exclaimed, making a wry face. "She's going to be led to slaughter, whether she likes it or not."

"Oh, I shall like it well enough, Fanny. I adore dancing. I shall be scared to death though, and you'll have to coach me a lot. You see, I wasn't brought up in society as you were."

"You were brought up properly and beautifully,

my dear," Mrs. Howell made haste to say. "Whoever trained you was to the manner born."

"Oh, yes, I can boast a few gentlewomen in my ancestry," Blue Bonnet laughed. "And the Ashes' blood is blue, if I do say it who shouldn't!"

It was at that moment Jim sauntered in leisurely from breakfast and joined in the conversation.

"And I engage the first dance, Blue Bonnet, and the second, and several towards the middle. Please don't forget. I hear your Uncle is doing the fox-trot."

"Beautifully, Jim, you should see him."

"Good business! Tell him to keep it up."

"Oh, he will! He has the craze just like the rest of us."

Jim smiled. "Yes," he quoted, "'the foxy are fox-trotting, and those who hesitate, return to hesitate again!' Great age we're living in."

"Wonderful! I'm thankful every day that I'm alive."

Blue Bonnet gave her hand to Jim, and bestowed a kiss on Mrs. Howell's cheek, which was given her cordially. "Good-by," she said, "I shan't forget the twentieth, you may be sure, and please know how much I appreciate what you are doing for me. My vocabulary is too limited to express my appreciation."

It was a little harder to part with Fanny, and it took longer. There was so much to say.

"You won't forget to look after the 'Home' a little, will you?" she begged. "So much depends on personal supervision. You can't trust contractors, though I believe Mr. Hummell is as trustworthy as any. Mr. Feganza *means* well, but he is so busy. You'll remember about the breakfast-room? It has to be widened five feet, so the matron and the nurses can all have meals there if they wish."

She was off in another minute, having been assured of Fanny's personal supervision and attention to details.

At the house Carita, Gabriel, and the servants had gathered on the veranda to say good-by. Carita and Gabriel looked a little wistful, but were cheered by promises of letters and souvenirs. The trunks had already gone and Simpkins stood at the curb waiting with the motor.

They were off at last, happy and gay. Even Aunt Lucinda, who had been looking worn and thin, brightened at the prospect of pleasures ahead, and Sarah beamed.

"Well, how does she compare with the 'Wanderer,' Honey?" Mr. Ashe asked when they were once comfortably aboard the "Sunset" and could turn attention from luggage to luxury. "Is she as fine in every way?"

Blue Bonnet let her gaze travel slowly about the car, pausing at the swinging easy-chairs, the book-cases, the buffet with its shining silver and glass.

“It’s pretty fine, Uncle Cliff. My memory of the ‘Wanderer’ is a bit hazy, but it would have to go some to beat this, wouldn’t it?”

Mr. Ashe thought it would.

The trip across the continent was a continuous delight. Each member of the party was jolly, considerate, anxious to make the others’ outing as joyous as possible. There were always enough hands for a rubber of bridge; there was the Victrola with new records; the latest books and magazines. But, best of all, there was the rear end of the car with what Blue Bonnet called the “veranda,” for the compact little affair with its steel railings and easy-chairs did resemble that very necessary adjunct to a dwelling.

Here the young people spent most of the time, enjoying the scenery, for, as if wishing to add full quota to the bliss, autumn lagged and lingered, and the noon day hours were warm and sunny.

“Could we possibly have selected a better time, Uncle Cliff?” Blue Bonnet asked as she followed John out on to the veranda to watch the Rockies in the moonlight. “Even the moon is shining — so brightly one could almost read a newspaper.”

“Moonlight is one of the delights of Colorado,” Uncle Cliff said, joining them with a fresh cigar. “It is wonderful owing to the clear rare atmosphere. Remember, you are seven thousand feet above the level of the sea now.”

"Seven thousand feet!" Blue Bonnet exclaimed, "and I don't feel a bit differently, except my heart is beating a little faster. I reckon it's just thrilling at these wonders."

They found comfortable seats, and John insisted upon wrapping Blue Bonnet in several rugs — up to her very eyebrows — until she complained that "she wanted her fingers to point with, even if it wasn't considered polite in the best society."

"Send Knight out here," she called after Uncle Cliff as he left them for bed at ten o'clock. "I'm not going in for an hour yet. He shouldn't miss these glories if he has seen them before."

"Do we need a chaperone?" John inquired when Uncle Cliff had passed into the car.

"Don't you think we do?"

"*Decidedly not.* Why?"

"Because — there are *conventions* — you know!" She smiled tantalizingly.

John murmured something about conventions under his breath which Blue Bonnet couldn't quite catch.

"According to rules laid down by the *Puritans* — and followed by *Bostonians*, you know."

"But we're in Colorado now!"

"Surely, but — there's Aunt Lucinda — she's related to the Puritans, Colorado or no Colorado! A leopard doesn't change his spots."

She was laughing at his discomfort.

"Couldn't we forget Boston for an hour?" he begged.

"Do you think it would be possible?"

"*Quite!*"

The appearance of Sarah put a stop to the banter.

"Knight has retired," she announced, "and so has Miss Clyde; your Uncle told me to tell you, Blue Bonnet."

"Thank you, Sarah. Can't you come out and keep us company? Did Uncle Cliff say I was to come in and go to bed, too?"

"No; he said you were to stay and see all you could."

"You see, Uncle Cliff doesn't know what a *convention* is," Blue Bonnet said to John. "You'd have to show the word to him in the dictionary and then explain in detail."

Sarah accepted the chair to which Blue Bonnet pointed, hesitatingly.

"I hope I'm not bothering," she said, "but I should like to see the mountains in the moonlight. I don't suppose I'll ever have another chance."

Blue Bonnet loved the way John made Sarah comfortable after that little speech. He seemed to recognize instantly how limited her opportunities had been — how much the trip was meaning to her. It was quite midnight before the three, absorbed in the fleeting wonders, stirred from their chairs.

They had seen Pike's Peak earlier in the day, and had enjoyed the glimpse of the old giant with his cap of snow. Blue Bonnet had been loath to part with the view.

There were cozy meals aboard the "Sunset," and the little peeks into the tiny kitchen where the colored chef prepared concoctions that were the marvel of all, delighted Blue Bonnet. She adored his immaculate white coats and caps, and the merry twinkle in his eyes. She was never through praising the dainties that he prepared especially for her, serving them with his own hands — an unheard-of condescension. Sometimes it was a delicious cake with her initials in the frosting, or a delectable pudding, or a cunning loaf of nut bread which took her back to childhood, when Benita baked for her family of dolls.

It was at the end of the fifth day in the early evening that the party finally reached their destination; tired but happy, and still enthusiastic: sorry to leave the car even for a good hotel.

Wonderful San Francisco! Even the name has a lure.

Blue Bonnet chose the upper deck of the boat for the short trip across the bay after leaving the car at Oakland. She and John leaned over the railing watching the glimmering lights that marked the city beyond.

"Isn't it heavenly?" she asked — "that amazing

view? See those millions of lights saying *welcome, welcome!* ”

But John was spellbound. The wonderful lights everywhere — myriads and myriads in the distance — on the wharf, on the shipping boats and incoming vessels, on the villages clustered along the bay; the dazzling, sparkling coronet that crowned the Ferry station; the soft reflections in the water — water which gently lapped the stern of the boat and ebbed away musically, entranced him.

“Isn’t it heavenly?” she repeated almost in a whisper.

“It is *marvelous!* ” he answered, baring his head to the soft, delicious breeze that blew in from the sea; and when he turned to her a look of perfect sympathy and understanding flashed between them.

Blue Bonnet was glad for many reasons that her uncle selected the beautiful Fairmont Hotel high up on the hill for their place of residence. She had been there before: she knew a short cut through the back that led directly to Chinatown with its charming shops and Oriental babies. They had scarcely been located a day when she initiated John Churchill and Sarah to the mysteries of Chinatown.

It was amusing to see Sarah shy away from the small yellow-skinned folk with whom Blue Bonnet chatted familiarly; to watch her amazement as gay little women shuffled along on shoes that were only

half shoes, in brilliant kimonos. She was timid in the shops, too, and stood near John and Blue Bonnet, as if fearing that she might be spirited away at any moment.

When Blue Bonnet insisted that she must see Chinatown at night to really appreciate it, glance down the narrow alleys and see the men and women grouped in their picturesque costumes, Sarah looked so wild-eyed and alarmed that Blue Bonnet doubled up with laughter.

But the Exposition! Blue Bonnet was fortunate enough to have her first glimpse of it at night, when the grounds were like fairyland. Lights glimmered everywhere, and flowers bloomed in profusion: pansies, violets, daffodils! On silver pools water lilies nodded, and yellow acacias shed their fragrance. Domes, blue and beautiful as turquoise, looked upward to the sky, and fountains played beneath changing lights, entralling the eye and awakening emotions.

Sarah clung to Blue Bonnet in a transport of happiness, her eyes glued to the Tower of Jewels, and Aunt Lucinda seemed stupefied to silence.

During the weeks that followed, Blue Bonnet learned to love the beautiful city that had sprung up by the sea with a devotion immeasurable. She was never too tired to seek out its treasures; to wander along the avenues rich with floral offerings; to stand entranced before the wonderful figure of the "Ris-

ing Sun " just poised for flight, chest out and muscles stretched for action.

" Some day he will *move* while I am watching him, Uncle Cliff, I *know* he will! Look at the vigor in his body, the eagerness in his face."

" I shouldn't wonder, Honey," he would answer, catching her enthusiasm.

" And ' Descending Night,' see how tired she is with the day's cares and work, but oh, how lovely! See how relaxed she is, how her head is bending and her wings are folding." Then for a reason Uncle Cliff could not understand — perhaps she herself could not understand — warm tears would come, obscuring sight, and they would pass on in silence.

" I have heard of genius for friendship, genius for art, and for many other things," Mrs. White said one day to Mr. Ashe as they watched Blue Bonnet stand entranced before a marvelous picture, " but Blue Bonnet has a *genius for beauty!* I have never known any one, much less a young girl, with such appreciation."

" Her mother had it," Mr. Ashe said, and his voice was tender. " She could find more joy in a Texas blue bonnet, common and plentiful as they were at the ranch, than most people would in an orchid, and her heart encircled the world."

" Then it is an inheritance? "

" A direct and divine one."

It was strange that, although Blue Bonnet ordi-

narily wanted Knight to share her pleasure, and turned to him in difficulties, it was John she singled out to enjoy the treasures she found; the picture that held her; the statue that entranced; the books that pleased and instructed.

They did not always agree — far from it — but each had tolerance for the opinion of the other.

“John knows so much,” Blue Bonnet would say to Sarah Blake. “He has seen so much. I feel like a perfect infant when he talks of art.”

And John would say to Mr. Ashe: “How intuitive Blue Bonnet is. She feels the beauty of things without knowing why. Experience and knowledge seem of little value beside her comprehension.”

There had been one or two very pleasant experiences at the Exposition. Blue Bonnet had been a constant visitor for nearly two weeks when one morning in the Palace of Arts her attention was drawn from her catalogue to a soft Southern drawl at her elbow.

“This picture is worth comin’ all the way from Nashville for, isn’t it, Felix? Look at the tears in that old lady’s eyes — it can’t be *paint*. They’re goin’ to drop!”

Blue Bonnet turned quickly and the next minute she and Mary Louise Patterson were in each other’s arms.

“*Honey!* where ever did you come from?” Mary Louise was saying, hardly able to get over her sur-

prise. "You're the last person on earth I should dream of findin'. Felix, come here. If we weren't married I shouldn't introduce you to Blue Bonnet, she's so charmin', but I reckon I'll have to."

Blue Bonnet glanced at the fine, rather foreign-looking man beside Mary Louise and gasped.

"You mean that you are married — really, Mary Louise?"

"Yes, Honey. You see, Mr. Shravens was comin' to the Exposition, and I thought it would be such a good time to learn something about pictures, so I asked him to bring me along."

"Don't you believe it, Miss Ashe, there was considerable coaxing on my part."

There was the same Southern softness in his speech, mingled with a slightly foreign accent. Blue Bonnet remembered that he was the artist who painted the Jackson House gardens for Annabel's wedding present, and that he had spent a great deal of time abroad.

"I did it to save his life, Blue Bonnet. He wanted to go back to France and fight, and — I held on to your coat tails, didn't I, darling?"

Mr. Shravens didn't argue the point; he merely gave his wife an adoring smile and turned his attention to Blue Bonnet. When they parted, both had arranged to dine with Blue Bonnet the next day.

CHAPTER VI

LETTERS

EVEN though Blue Bonnet was rushed from morning until night, she managed to find time to write home, and while the letters were more or less scrappy, they were characteristic enough of Blue Bonnet to be interesting. She wrote Kitty at some length, because she wanted to bring what sunshine she could into her gloom. She strove to be cheerful. She wrote :

“ DEAREST KITTY :

“ Please don't think when you see this somewhat bulky letter that I am going to bore you with descriptions of all the wonderful things I am seeing here. I am not. I made up my mind long ago that I would never weary my friends with details of places they had never seen, and not long ago when Uncle Cliff came home from a dinner party at the Howells — our neighbors in Brookline — and said he had been caught in a calm with a woman who took him up the Nile and down again until he was seasick, I was more resolved than ever.

“ But it is hard not to enthuse a little, for everything is so wonderful and beautiful, and I keep wishing all the time that you and Amanda were here to enjoy it with me. It has been great fun to have Sarah, only she is in a trance most of the time.

“ We leave early in the morning for the Exposition Grounds and usually part at the entrance. Uncle Cliff wants to see the cattle, and the cows milked by electricity; Sarah spends hours in the Fine Arts Building with Aunt Lucinda and Mrs. White; Knight has a hankerin’ for the Machinery Palace, while John and I vibrate between the French Building, the Fine Arts and Festival Hall. Am sending you a book with all these buildings marked.

“ We meet at the Horticultural Building — a gorgeous place all palms and ferns and plants, with a large dining-room and an Hawaiian band — and we have lunch. We never seem to tire of eating sliced pineapple to the strains of Aloha. In the evening — (we have lunch at a charming Inn just inside the grounds) — we stay for the fire-works and the thousand other attractions that make life here one long beautiful dream from which you dread to waken.

“ A week ago we ran into Mary Louise Patterson, or Mrs. Shravens she is now, for she’s on her honeymoon. Her brother is here also — Randall,

whom you met last spring in Boston. They have dined with us once, and we have been their guests at luncheon, but there isn't much time for visiting, as every one wants to see as much of the Exposition as possible. Randall has attached himself to our party. He says it is simply deadly to be in the wake of a bride and groom, and he's lonesome. I enjoy him very much, for he is great fun, but I believe Knight and John think he is *de trop*, for they aren't a bit cheerful or bright when he comes on the scene. Aren't men queer?

"Mary Louise and I had one good visit, and she told me all about Annabel. She stopped there a few days on her way West. She says Annabel is so happy, and that her home is lovely. Sue is keeping house for her father and giving tea parties almost every day — you know she always declared she would. Mary Louise says that Billy is the most devoted husband in the world, but, of course, he would be. One couldn't help adoring Annabel.

"We have had some very amusing experiences. It is almost as interesting to listen to the scraps of conversation that people let fall as to see the Exposition. The other day John and I were resting in one of the beautiful avenues close to a charming little figure in bronze of Pan, piping to the frog. It is a charming piece, the darling Pan holding the slender reed between his fingers. A woman came along taking such strides that a little

boy beside her could scarcely keep pace. The child lagged in front of Pan. 'Look at the little boy!' he cried, pointing to the figure; 'what is he doing?' The woman gave one glance and answered, 'Oh, he's shooting peas at a frog.' Shooting peas at a frog! It hurt my very soul.

"Another funny thing which Uncle Cliff witnessed yesterday. There are a number of articles exhibited in the different buildings which are not in competition for the various prizes offered, and a card to that effect is in evidence. Uncle Cliff saw a man and woman holding a heated conversation over a bust of what the man took to be Susan B. Anthony. The woman said it was not, she felt sure. The man insisted he was right, when the woman, adjusting her pince-nez to her short-sighted eyes, remarked triumphantly: 'Certainly it is *not*! The name of this is *Not in Competition*! See, it is there on the card.'

"Chinatown, as always, fascinates me. The other night we came home early from the Exposition and after leaving the car walked back to the hotel by way of Chinatown. John wanted to show us one of his discoveries—a Chinese apothecary who is the most adorable person you ever saw in your life. He has the funniest little shop about which the Chinese group in the evenings, waiting for various concoctions which he puts up for them. And, my dear, I, with my own

eyes — otherwise I should not believe it — saw him fill a prescription with *fifteen* different kinds of herbs in it. I've been wondering ever since how long it took the patient to die. It didn't seem possible that any one could take all that stuff and live. He carefully measured each thing in a pair of scales, taking a pinch out, or putting more in, until the parcel looked as if it might weigh several pounds. And all the while he was weighing and measuring, a great black cat sat blinking into the scales as if he wanted to see that the thing was done right. The cat's name is Ah Tom — isn't that adorable? We went into the shop to stroke his black fur and one of the men told us.

“ But the apothecary! How I wish you might see him. He has a face that lingers in one's memory long after he himself has passed from view. It is aristocratic, gentle, clever, with eyes that are all seeing and yet inscrutable — queer little slanting eyes that are as black as shoe buttons and yet have soft shadowy lights in them. But it is his absolute indifference to the crowd that makes him interesting. After he had filled several prescriptions he sat down in the window on a high stool to write — *with a brush*, if you please — and the fascinating strokes he made were as beautiful as an etching. We watched him for nearly an hour and he only glanced up once: that was to stroke Ah Tom, who had snuggled up beside him.

“I couldn’t help wondering about his family life; what his wife looked like, and his children, for certainly any one so utterly fascinating never escaped matrimony.

“But here I am gossiping when I stated positively that I wouldn’t. And please don’t think because I am so terribly frivolous I am not mindful of your sorrow. I think of you every day and wish I might say something to comfort you, but I know from experience that the kindest words from the kindest friends help but little at such a time. Be assured of this, Kitty dear, I know every step of the hard way of grief — for although I was so young when my own dear mother left me — still — she was my mother, and her place can never be filled. If you think this letter is at all worth while (I don’t) pass it on to Amanda. She will be charitable, as you must be, remembering that I am stealing time from my beauty sleep to send even this scrappy bit. My eyes are at the point where they need sticks to hold them open. I am too sleepy to see the sandman, but I know he is near.

“As always, with heaps of love,

“BLUE BONNET.”

And Kitty wrote Blue Bonnet:

“Everything moves along in Woodford in the same old way, your letters being the only bright

spots in my rather gloomy days. I am really glad that I have the care of the house, otherwise I should get so blue. Father is not at all well, which worries me considerably, but I think when the first keen edge of his grief is over he will be better and take more interest in things. Dear little mother! I miss her more as the days go on and probably shall. And yet, do you know, Blue Bonnet, I would not have her back under the same conditions if it were possible. I was thinking the other day that I had never in all my life seen her face without a look of suffering, and yet she rarely complained. But I mustn't spoil your happiness by my sorrow.

"Amanda is a dear. She has spent a great deal of time with me, and I hardly know what I should have done without her. Father and I ran up to Boston for a few days last week. I wanted to do a little shopping, and I think Father wanted to get away from Woodford for a little while. I missed not seeing you as usual, but was glad to think you were enjoying such a lovely trip. How is that nice Mr. Churchill? I so often think of the difficulty I led him into last spring with Ferren's car and the awful walk we had to take. He was such a dear about it. I wonder if he has ever forgiven me? I have never been able to stand the sight of the French heeled shoes since.

"Alec writes that he will be here for a few

weeks at Christmas. I don't know where he is going to stay I'm sure, as the General has closed the house. He may be coming back to be with Alec. I shall be very glad to see them both — especially the General" (which made Blue Bonnet laugh) "as we have always been such good friends. I don't know why Alec selected Woodford for his vacation, I'm sure. It's as dead as a door nail, but Amanda's gold angel, Mr. Everett, is coming, too, so we may be able to do something pleasant.

"Debby is quite crazy about the college in Wisconsin, and her letters are real entertaining. Her aunt and uncle are evidently lovely to her, and she is meeting a good many young people.

"Oh, yes, I must tell you that my one diversion these days is entertaining the minister — the young man who took Mr. Blake's place. He's really very nice. He isn't a bit churchy, and doesn't urge me to take a class in the Sunday School, as Mr. Blake used to. He rather runs to poetry, and adores our sunsets, and declared the other evening, when he took me for a ride, that he was *very* fond of color: that he even admired red hair, which was going some, I thought. I told him I loathed it and was glad mine was on the rose order. I can imagine your having a good laugh at my driving with him, but Woodford is so stupid one welcomes anything for a change.

“ I was out to the cemetery yesterday with some flowers and I took some to your dear grandmother. Please don’t thank me, I love to do it for both you and her.

“ If there was a scrap of news I’d give it to you, but there isn’t. With oceans of love, always the same,
“ KITTY.”

And one day, quite unexpectedly, this interesting bit of news came from Sue.

“ DEAREST BLUE BONNET :

“ I am so happy these days that the time seems to take wings. It is *so* good to be at home and not grinding away at Miss North’s. I put in every hour I can having a good time to make up for all those months lost at school. Aren’t you glad you’re educated? It takes so much time, and there is so little to show for it — at least that’s the way I feel, but, of course, I never was the bright and shining light you were.

“ Father is so delighted to have me at home that he is willing to do almost anything to keep me here, and I assure you that wild horses couldn’t drag me away. It’s too heavenly being your own boss and managing a house just the way you want to.

“ What do you hear from the girls at Miss North’s? Does it seem possible that Carita and Mary Boyd are grown up now, and eligible to the

Lambs? I always think of them as little girls. I had a letter from Mary the other day and she had been up to some of her pranks. She said the Lambs were planning a lot of high jinks for the initiation. Will you ever forget the night Wee saw the mouse? And, by the way, speaking of Wee, I had the surprise of my life a few weeks ago when Father and I ran up to Chicago. We were in the hotel waiting for some friends to take us to the theater when I saw a perfectly stunning, tall, willowy young person coming towards me with her hand out, smiling as if she had found a long lost relative. It was Wee! But not our fat, roly poly Wee — not by a long sight. It was Wee minus thirty pounds of the old avoirdupois (hope that's spelled right, haven't time to look it up) and, Blue Bonnet, she was stunning — *simply stunning!* Everybody turned to look at her, and I couldn't believe my eyes. She did it all in four months by not eating bread and butter and potatoes — and oh, yes, sweets and desserts. Think of Wee giving up pie when she traces her New England ancestry back to the Pilgrims!

“And what do you think she is doing! Playing in a stock company, and is really quite a rage. Just fancy — *our old Wee!* She sits up nights learning new parts and spends her mornings with a teacher perfecting her voice and cultivating her accent. I felt so proud of her. Do you remem-

ber how that Laura Perkins in Number 12 used to say that she was so proud of the diamond necklace that the wife of the laundryman in her home town wore, because she'd contributed so much toward paying for it (you remember how extravagant she was with washing) well, that's the way I felt about Wee. I'd suffered and bled and died to help her voice along, and now I can watch her shine on the stage and have a share in the glory. We went to see her the other night and she was really clever.

"Annabel is so happy in her home. She lives only a few blocks away and I see her often. Already she has settled down into the most particular little housewife imaginable, and I can hardly drag her out even to an afternoon tea. Her house is adorable, and, would you believe it, she has hardly a frill from cellar to attic? They are trying to be very economical, and keep only one maid, and Annabel *hates* to dust. She has put away every unnecessary thing, and one feels as if one could breathe and move in comfort. She hasn't a lace curtain in her house; just exquisite cretonnes in perfect taste. But I shan't take time to describe the house. You will see it for yourself when you make that promised visit in the spring.

"There is very little news. Did I tell you that the 'Billings person,' as dear old Patty used to call

him, is to be in Chicago before long on business? He expects to run over here for a few days. I don't object to the name of 'Ben' at all any more. In fact, it sounds rather good to me. 'Nuff said!

"I forgot to tell you about Patty. They say she entered college with such recommendations from Miss North that she's terribly looked up to. The girls in the Freshman class are so proud to be on speaking terms with her that they cross their fingers and go up and touch her every once in a while to show their intimacy and reverence.

"Good-by for to-night.

"Ever thine,

"SUE."

Carita's letters were mere apologies. She was too busy to think, much less to write, and Blue Bonnet, having gone over the same ground the year before at Miss North's, understood and forgave. Fräulein wrote regularly, stiff formal letters which advised Blue Bonnet of her "ménage," with assurances that everything was moving exactly as Miss Ashe would have it.

Gabriel's communications were mostly postscripts added to Carita's letters. He was working hard — especially with his violin — had at last mastered fractions, and learned the name of the girl in the pink dress. It was Constance Moore. She was wearing

white now, and he had lost interest. Algernon Sidney was well and sent best regards. He begged to remain, "Yours truly,

"GABRIEL DEL DARD O ASHE."

CHAPTER VII

BLUE BONNET HAS HER FORTUNE TOLD

"BUT I do want to. I want to very much!"

Blue Bonnet halted before the tent of the celebrated Sivrouka of India, the greatest astrologer the world had ever known (so his advertisement read) and peeked in curiously.

Mr. Ashe stood with a restraining hand on her shoulder.

"Come on, Honey, you only *think* you want to have your fortune told; you don't really."

"Yes, I do, Uncle Cliff, very much."

"But you don't believe in that stuff!"

"What stuff?"

"Astrology, or whatever they call it."

"I believe the star you were born under has a great deal to do with your life," Blue Bonnet said loftily.

"Bosh!"

"Certainly I do. Take people born in March for instance, they're always blustery like the wind; and April people are temperamental. They're either sunshine or shadow."

“And by the same token August people are hot-tempered — like the weather in dog days?”

“Yes, I reckon so — *I* am. Oh, come on, Uncle Cliff, please. Maybe he can tell me a lot of things I want to know.”

Inside the tent dark swarthy men in baggy trousers and brilliant turbans paced to and fro scanning the crowd anxiously. One of them led Blue Bonnet to a small booth where the Oracle sat enthroned.

“Sivrouka is engaged at present,” she said coming back hastily. “I can’t see him for a few minutes. There are other Seers here, but I want to see him. Mary Louise says he is perfectly wonderful. He told her the most remarkable things, Uncle Cliff: that she had just been married, and that her husband was an artist, and — well, you needn’t laugh, he did!”

“It would not take a Seer to know that Mary Louise had just been married, Honey; and if her husband hasn’t artist written all over him I’ll eat my hat. He’s a type; you’d recognize it a mile off.”

“Oh, you’re so skeptical, Uncle Cliff! Anyway, he couldn’t know just where she was born, could he, and what her tastes were, and her father’s business?”

“All right, Honey.”

Sivrouka was at last disengaged and Blue Bonnet paused at the door of the booth to speak with Sarah.

“You must be ready to have him give you a read-

ing when I am through," she said. "Mary Louise says he really gave her good advice. He told her what her lucky days were, and lots of interesting things. It's quite an opportunity."

She entered the august presence with keen anticipation, and sitting down in front of the pine table, to which she was directed, crossed her hands on the edge expectantly.

"Your date of birth, please; the hour, the day, the year. Be explicit," came in slow measured tones broken with a peculiar accent.

Blue Bonnet gave the date, but she could not be sure of the day, nor the hour.

Sivrouka consulted a pamphlet which he kept beside him, and after doing some figuring announced that Blue Bonnet had been born on Sunday, a most beautiful and opportune time to enter the world, for Sunday's child was full of grace, and would live long and prosper. She was born when the sun was in Leo, which gave her a disposition that was generous, a heart that was kind, and much magnetism.

"You were born to lead," he declared, taking Blue Bonnet's unwilling hand into his own begrimed and much-ringed one. "You have a mission in life which you will fulfill nobly."

"A mission? Have I really? What is it?"

"We will come to that later, *Mees*." The *Mees* amused Blue Bonnet. It was both deferential and patronizing.

“You have strong individuality; high, noble ideals. You are possessed of great power for good, and can usually inspire others to accomplish good. You are strong in your love of family — your own people, and will allow no harm to come to them if you can help it. You are exceedingly fond of children, and will yield to no dictation in their management. You are inclined to do things in your own way, and people around you usually find it best to say nothing, but let you alone. You are good at planning, but you hate detail. You abhor figures, or anything pertaining to mathematics, but you would have no difficulty with them if you exercised patience.”

Blue Bonnet drew her hand away and leaned back in her chair, but Sivrouka got a second hold and began again.

“You are fond of a home and home comforts; an ideal *home-maker*, which means more than a *house-keeper*. You are splendidly endowed for a position of trust and responsibility, and would do well in any kind of business. You draw people to you unconsciously by your sunny disposition and are very congenial. You will rely on your own opinions no matter what others say. You do your own thinking.”

“But my faults,” Blue Bonnet said, “tell me what they are?”

“And did you consider these all virtues, Mees?” the Seer asked with a smile and a shrug. He leaned

over and looked into Blue Bonnet's eyes. "You are a child of fate," he said with evident sincerity. "The gods are your friends: they watch over you. You were born of love — love and affection. In your veins runs the blood of promise. You have inherited the best from many generations. See that you keep the stream unsullied. Select your lifemate wisely, remembering that he will be the father of your children."

Blue Bonnet leaned back in the chair, flushed.

"I shall never marry," she said; "I have work to accomplish."

"Yes — that is true, *Mees*, very true; you have work. But the man of your choice — I see him now — close beside you —"

Blue Bonnet looked over her shoulder quickly, and the Seer laughed.

"Yes, there, *Mees*, *without*."

"And what about him?"

"He will help you — aid you, sustain you. Through him you will be successful."

A light broke over Blue Bonnet's face.

"Oh, you mean my uncle. He is my guardian. He is always interested in what I do."

But the East Indian shook his head impatiently.

"The uncle I can see, also, but it is the *young* man, *Mees*, the dark young man with the friendly eyes and the humorous mouth — You like not the suggestion?" he broke off suddenly.

"It is not true," Blue Bonnet answered. "I shall be wedded to my work." Then, as if to test his ability: "What is my work?"

"It is with children," Sivrouka answered without a moment's hesitation. "I see them all around you; many, too many to be your own. And your opportunity for good is unlimited. It was decreed long before Mees entered this vale. She was selected. Believe or not!" He shrugged his shoulders indifferently.

He was silent for a moment as if thinking deeply.

"There is sorrow for Mees," he said presently. "A great worry. The clouds hang dark, but the light shines beyond — a little at first, then in a glory. When that hour comes remember Sivrouka, what he tells you, and have hope."

"A great sorrow? Oh, please don't say that! I have had so many."

"But sorrow is part of life. Would Mees be exempt? Different from the rest — the favored one? That is selfish. It is through sorrow we grow."

"But sorrow frightens one — even the bravest."

"I said the light would break, Mees — *in a glory!* Is not that enough?"

"Are you very sure? How can you tell? Everything in life is uncertain."

Sivrouka threw up his hands in gesture toward the skies.

"It is so written, Mees, in the stars. The great Allah has decreed. Be not afraid."

"Have I other sorrows?"

"No one is exempt, Mees. But the fates to you have been kind. I must dismiss you now; others wait without."

Blue Bonnet looked very serious as she left the booth, and Uncle Cliff watched her face closely as she came toward him.

"Well," he said amused, "did you find out all you wanted to know?"

"Oh, a good deal — yes."

"And you believed all he said — took it for gospel truth?"

"No — not all, of course not. He read my character well — only he was far too generous. He told me some things that were very silly and improbable. I suppose they all do."

They were alone now, outside the tent. Sarah and Mrs. White had suddenly decided to have the veil lifted, also.

"What were the silly things, Honey?"

"Oh, nothing! Uncle Cliff, did you ever know anybody with *friendly* eyes?"

"A great many people, Honey."

"Have you, really? Should you say that Knight's eyes were friendly?"

"Decidedly."

"And Randall's?"

“ Moderately so.”

“ And John’s? ”

“ Very.”

“ Well — whose should you say were — the *most* friendly? ”

“ Now, that’s getting me into deep water. I couldn’t say without proper examination. Suppose we line them up and see.”

“ Oh, Uncle Cliff, don’t you dare do such a thing! Don’t you even mention that I asked you. It’s all perfectly silly anyway — I — I only just wondered.”

They had gone but a few steps further when she said :

“ What kind of a mouth would you call a *humorous* mouth, Uncle Cliff? ”

“ A humorous mouth, Honey? Well, now, I’m not up much on those things. Here comes John, ask him.”

Blue Bonnet caught her uncle’s coat sleeve in a frantic effort to stop him, but it was too late. He had put the question.

When John struggled with an answer Blue Bonnet was utterly oblivious and disinterested. Her gaze was directed toward the Tower of Jewels in which she had suddenly discovered a new feature.

That night, under the cover of darkness — for Blue Bonnet had crept into Sarah’s room for a little gossip — confidences were exchanged.

"I was just dying to know what Sivrouka told you, Sarah, do you mind telling me?"

"Oh, no — that is — some of it. He read my character quite well, I thought. He told me that I was born when the sun was in Sagittarius, whatever that means, and that I would travel a good deal, and that my success would come through influential friends; that — this sounds very egotistical, Blue Bonnet, but — that I had a loving, thoughtful disposition, was industrious and fond of detail; that I knew how to attend to my own business and was careful in money matters."

"Did he? Good enough! He couldn't have done better if he'd known you."

"I thought some of it was true," said the modest Sarah.

"And what else?"

Sarah hesitated.

"Go on — then I'll tell you what he said about me."

"He said I had a mission in life, Blue Bonnet."

"A mission! What kind of a mission?"

"Something to do with children."

"With children!" There was amazement in Blue Bonnet's tones.

"Yes — small children. He said he could see them all around me."

"He did? Why, I believe he tells everybody the same thing! That's exactly what he said to me!"

“He did?”

“Yes — but maybe he saw you at my settlement house. Of course you will be there often.”

“No — I don’t think it was that — exactly.”

“What could it have been then?”

“Oh, it was so improbable and silly, Blue Bonnet.”

“What was silly?”

“That I — should marry.”

“Marry!” Kitty’s predictions for Sarah’s future flashed through Blue Bonnet’s mind.

“He said I would marry a widower with five children. Think of it! And that the children would need me awfully.”

“I should think they might — five without a mother! Where are you to live? I hope it won’t take you away from Woodford.”

“He didn’t say, but you needn’t be alarmed. It’s all perfect nonsense.”

“Of course it is — I mean the things he tells — but it’s interesting. Was he nice — this man to be?”

“Yes — so Sivrouka said. I think he is a minister or something — anyway, Sivrouka said he could see him lecturing — ”

“Probably, with *five* children. He’d have to talk until he was hoarse — if they were all like Gabriel — mischievous, you know. Sarah, don’t you do it. It would be awful! If they were girls, think of the heads you’d have to comb every morning, and the

dressess to make and keep in order, and the shoes to buy. And if they were boys — the finger-nails to keep clean and the trousers to mend and — ”

“ Oh, I don't think I should mind,” Sarah answered complacently, and fell to dreaming so quietly that Blue Bonnet slipped out of the room and across the hall to meditate on her own future until the wee small hours of morning.

And next door to Blue Bonnet a woman lay thinking. Thinking of the wonderful change that had been wrought in her life through the interest of a young girl — too young to realize what her bounties meant.

Alicia White's life had been a series of ups and downs, mostly downs, she sometimes thought in reviewing it. She had known wealth and poverty, happiness and tragedy. Sometimes the sun had shone in brilliant splendor, only to be obscured by clouds.

Born in New York, of rich parents, she had been favored with every advantage until she was nearly nineteen, then her father, who was a plunger in the stock market, failed utterly. Her mother had died only the year before, and her death, coupled with extensive losses, unbalanced her father's mind. He died without realizing that he was leaving a penniless, inexperienced girl to battle with the world as best she might.

Fortunately, she had her musical training her

beautiful voice which had been cultivated by the best masters. She strove to make a living by teaching, but few people have confidence in the methods of so young a teacher. She was about to give up, hopeless and despondent, when an uncle, an army officer on leave of absence in New York, found her, and carried her off to San Francisco where his regiment was stationed.

But life had not proved a rosy dream even then. The uncle had a young wife who was vain and foolish. She had no desire to have Alicia share her home and admirers, and did not hesitate to announce the fact. Alicia was too charming, too lovable.

The uncle, however, was adamant. He insisted that the only child of his dead sister should have shelter in his home; that she should at least remain until a more suitable place could be provided.

The result was inevitable. Young and inexperienced, lacking wisdom and guidance, she fell in love with handsome, irresponsible Cranston White of her uncle's regiment, and ended by marrying him.

She never liked to review the three years that followed; her husband's wild dissipation, the heartache, the sorrow; the loss of her baby girl, a wee, blue-eyed thing that promised so much, with her mother's sunny smile and happy nature.

And now, after nearly sixteen years, she was back again in the city from which she had fled — fled in the night to escape the wild dissipations of the man

she had grown to hate, and from whom she had never heard directly again. He had been transferred to foreign service soon after her departure, that she learned from her uncle; but her uncle was retired from active service soon after, and so the chapter was closed and ended.

News of his death had come to her, but it was mere gossip. She had never taken the pains to verify it, caring little since he let her alone. But now that she was so safe, and seemingly secure in the love that hedged her in on all sides, she sometimes wished that she were free; free from the shackle that, by law, still held her. She wanted peace, more than freedom; wanted to feel that the miserable creature who had caused her so much unhappiness would not turn up at some inopportune time to embarrass and hound her.

San Francisco had awakened old memories. To-day she had slipped away from the rest of the party and traversed the old ground; she scarcely knew why, but something seemed to beckon her from the army quarters and she could not rest until she had followed the call. There was little change. The house in which she had fought her battles and struggled with her problems was still standing, sinister and old.

For a moment while she stood looking up at the windows, rosy with the glow of the waning afternoon sun, she lived over all the horrors of those three

years: the heartache, the misery, the wretchedness; her baby's birth and death. Then, unable to longer bear the sight, she fled down the street, her eyes blinded with tears, her heart almost breaking with the weight of the load it carried.

To-night past scenes opened and paraded before her. She tried to shake the memories from her, but again and again they returned to mock her. She tried to obliterate the face of Cranston White which constantly rose before her vision, but his cold, cruel eyes seemed to hold hers by force, and his voice rang in her ears.

It was very late, but she got up finally, and turning on the light, slipped into a warm dressing-gown and sat down by the window. The city was sleeping; peace had settled over the landscape. Even the noisy cables had at last ceased — ceased with a long expiring groan, as if weary with the day's burden and work.

She had been sitting but a moment when a gentle tap at the door aroused her. She crossed the room and held the door wide. Blue Bonnet's head peered in.

"Are you ill, Mrs. White?" she asked. "I saw the light, and heard you moving about."

"No, dear. I'm sorry I wakened you."

"Oh, but you didn't. I've been awake for hours. I can't get to sleep."

"What's the matter?"

"A little tired, maybe. My brain keeps going round and round. I've thought of everything under the shining sun. May I come in for a minute? I simply can't go to sleep."

Mrs. White pulled a small chair close to her own and wrapped a soft quilt about Blue Bonnet's knees.

"There! Comfy now?" she inquired, and smiled into the girl's tired face.

"So comfy, thank you. You're sure I'm not keeping you up?"

"Not at all. I'm glad to have you."

"I went to sleep once — only a doze, and then something wakened me. I think it must have been the music over in that apartment house. They were having a dance. I recognized 'Araby' and 'Cecile.' Did you?"

"Yes; I heard the music."

"It was on the top floor. The blinds were up and I could see the people flitting by. That glassed-in porch must be a conservatory. A girl and a man kept coming out there, and I did a perfectly dreadful thing. I got my opera glasses and watched them. He was quite crazy about her, you could see that without the glasses. And I think she liked him, too — the way she smiled and all — you know the look! And then — he kissed her. In such a sweet, grave way — just as you'd fancy a man would kiss the girl who was going to be his wife. I put the glasses away then. I felt terribly ashamed — as if

I'd been listening behind a door. Mrs. White, how does a girl know when she's in love with a man? How does she know whether it's the *man* she's in love with or — whether she's just in love — *with love?* ”

“ I don't know, Blue Bonnet. If I did, and could tell you and countless other girls, I could reduce half the misery in the world. It is the glamour of love that blinds. That's why Cupid's eyes are so often bandaged. Are you beginning to think of love, dear? ”

“ Oh, no! That is — I suppose every girl *thinks* about it. Why, even Sarah ” — she laughed gleefully — “ was mooning when I left her awhile ago. And over a widower whom she's never seen. One that Sivrouka conjured up.”

Mrs. White laughed, too.

“ And when your friends begin to be engaged, like Amanda, and Sue — Sue isn't yet, exactly, but I'm sure she's going to be soon — why it sort of makes you sit up and take notice.”

“ Naturally.”

“ But, of course, no matter how in love I was, I couldn't marry with the work I've set out to do. It would look so weak, wouldn't it? As if I didn't quite know what I did want. I don't think settlement work and marriage mix, do you? ”

“ That all depends.”

“ Depends on what? ”

"The man; he might be a help rather than a hindrance."

"Do you think so?" There was a gleam of hope in the tone.

"I'm quite positive."

"Mrs. White — do you like Randall Patterson?" Blue Bonnet brought her chair a little closer.

"Yes; I think he's bright and entertaining."

"Do you think he's friendly — that is — *looks* friendly?"

"Very."

"Do you think he's humorous?"

"Exceedingly."

"Do you think he's more friendly — that is — *looks* more friendly than John?"

"On the surface, perhaps."

"How can you tell — by his eyes?"

"Partly."

The lines between Blue Bonnet's eyes deepened.

"Looks are often deceiving, aren't they?"

"Often."

"But don't you think John Churchill's mouth is — more humorous than Randall's? The corners turn up more; that's a sign, isn't it?"

"I believe so, Blue Bonnet. Suppose you tell me what it is you want to know and I'll try to help you."

"Oh, it isn't anything! Really it isn't! I love to compare people." There was enough truth in this statement to save Blue Bonnet's natural integrity.

They chatted on for a while, Blue Bonnet snuggling into the warm quilt cozily. She began to yawn presently and rose to go.

"I hope I haven't kept you up," she said, pausing at the door — the rooms adjoined — "and I do hope Aunt Lucinda hasn't heard us. I don't think she could — across the hall, do you?"

"Scarcely, Blue Bonnet."

"Because she wouldn't understand my visiting at this hour of the night — or morning, rather. And then, too — I have a feeling that sometimes Aunt Lucinda feels a little — *outside* — because of our friendship. I don't want her to."

"She must never feel that way, Blue Bonnet. I want to be as companionable to you as possible, but never to take the place that belongs to her. You must let her see that."

"Oh, she's very fond of you, Mrs. White — but — well, you know how it is. I couldn't tell Aunt Lucinda the things I've been telling you to-night, much as I love her. She wouldn't understand. But, after all, we each have our special places in the world. Aunt Lucinda has hers. She's wonderful at training people. Look at Katy and Delia and Denham, and her Sunday-school girls, and *me!* I'm a living example of what Aunt Lucinda can bring out of chaos."

She laughed under her breath, lest the sound might reach the chamber across the hall, and started

to go. On second thought she went back and gave Mrs. White a kiss — a rather unusual thing for her to do, friendly as they were.

“Thank you so much for mothering me,” she said. “That was all I needed to-night.”

Mrs. White took the flushed face between her cool hands and looked into the eyes raised to her own, wistfully.

“And thank you for being my little girl,” she said. “You know I had one once — my little Barbara. She would have been just your age now.”

Then she opened the door and said “shoo” quickly, so that the young girl might not see the merciful tears that had come with a rush to soothe the tired heart.

CHAPTER VIII

THE CONGRESSIONAL BALL

THE days were now flying by all too quickly. It was Wednesday, and at the end of the week the party would be facing southward — all but John Churchill, who was returning to Boston.

Early November had found the weather delightful, although the old settlers sounded the warning for umbrellas and rain-coats as the rainy season was about to begin.

“Even the weather man is on our side,” Blue Bonnet said to John Churchill, for not a drop fell. The sun shone with the warmth of June.

They were standing in the early twilight watching the waves of the great Pacific as they gently lashed the shore. The water seemed dark and forbidding in the waning light and Blue Bonnet turned to the Exposition grounds for cheer.

“I think I’ve had enough of Martha Washington’s things for this evening,” she said, giving the Mt. Vernon cottage a last lingering look. “Suppose we go over to the Court of the Ages and have a peep at the murals as the lights come on.”

She fitted her step to John’s easy swinging stride

and walked on hurriedly, for dusk was already settling down over the buildings.

They reached the Arch just as the lights came twinkling like fairy stars into the swinging lanterns. Beyond, in the corridors, soft lambent flickerings touched the murals into hallowed splendor.

John paused and caught his breath quickly.

"What a night," Blue Bonnet heard him say, "and what a scene!"

They stood for a moment drinking in the beauty. John's eyes passed from the wonders of the court to Blue Bonnet's face. Her frank, almost childish joy in the lights, the color, the wonderful flora of the avenues, amazed and delighted him.

"I believe you have the greatest capacity to *live* of any one I have ever known," he said softly.

"Have I? I'm glad. It's good to be alive to-night. See those young trees over there — how they tremble in the moonlight. Don't you suppose they are thrilled as we are? Perhaps they are talking. You know:

"'The Gods talk in the breath of the woods;
They talk in the shaken pine;
And fill the long reach of the old sea shore
With dialogue divine.'"

They had reached the corridor now and she stood leaning against the stone railing. The place was almost deserted and evening hush had fallen. The sweet night breeze played with her flyaway hair —

still flyaway despite her effort to restrain it — and her gaze was fixed on the stars.

“Isn’t it glorious!” She lowered her eyes to meet John’s. “Don’t you think it must be a mile nearer heaven — by actual measurement — than any other place?”

“I’m sure of it — *to-night!*”

Her hand lay temptingly near his on the railing. He made no effort to take it, sweeping back the desire that was in his heart: the desire to tell her that he loved her; that he relied on her for happiness. He hesitated because it seemed unfair — unfair from every standpoint. She was young — but little more than a child in years and experience. She had known few men. Her opportunities to know them had been limited. Suppose she returned his affection . . . how could she be sure . . . sure it was he whom she loved. . . .

And then she was rich — and he was poor, poor at least, compared with her vast inheritance. What had he to offer — other than a heart full of love and a life-long devotion?

Silence fell between them. Somewhere in the distance a band played and the sound floated to them plaintively. Overhead, flocks of sea gulls weary with the day’s wanderings flew homeward, calling to their mates.

“Shall we have a last look at the murals?” Blue Bonnet said finally, dreading to break the spell that

had come upon them. "I adore them in this light. We'll look at your favorite and then at mine.

"How I hate to say good-by to them," she said when she had looked to her heart's content, "but I suppose I must. I think I'll get over all the hard things I have to do to-night. Suppose you come with me while I say farewell to Wildflower and the Duck Baby."

Blue Bonnet's taste was catholic. From the murals to the charming bronze figures was a mighty jump, but her heart had room for all her treasures.

"Where now?" John asked when she had waved adieu to Wildflower.

"I'm sorry, but I think I'll have to leave you now. I promised Randall that I would go with him to the California Building to-night and dance — the Congressional ball, you know. Mary Louise is going to chaperone. Won't you come, too?"

"I think not, thank you. Where is Mrs. White?"

"At the hotel, with a headache. I didn't like to leave her, but she seemed to want to rest — besides, I had this engagement with you."

"It was good of you to keep it."

"I considered my own happiness, I assure you. You think you won't come? I'll save you a fox-trot."

"Not to-night."

"And maybe a one-step."

"Please don't tempt me. It's hardly fair to Patterson."

"Oh, I didn't intend to give him all the dances."

She started toward the entrance to the grounds to get the car for the hotel. At the gate they met Knight. She extended the invitation to him.

"It's going to be wonderful," she said, her face aglow — "a beautiful ball, and Uncle Cliff has invitations for us all."

Knight was not enthusiastic.

"There will be senators and congressmen, and decorations — oh, magnificent decorations; and the forbidden garden to wander in between the dances, and —"

Knight interrupted the flow of possibilities with a remark:

"Say, Blue Bonnet, by the way, when is Patterson going to release the mortgage on your time? I haven't had a look in since he arrived. What's he attaching himself to this party for, anyway?"

"Because I asked him — probably."

"Oh, I see."

"And not only that, I like him. He was very kind to me in Nashville last year, and he's an old friend of the dearest friend I have. Isn't that enough? If it isn't, I *could* give you another reason."

A look, half surprise, half challenge, shot from Knight's eyes to John's. If Blue Bonnet had caught

the twinkle that broke there she would have been prepared for what came next, but she was too busy searching the crowd for Uncle Cliff.

"And, if I come," Knight inquired, "how many dances do I get?"

"As many as you like, of course. There will be enough — and to spare!"

"And I," John ventured, "am to have a fox trot, a one-step and several others? It requires an effort to get into evening clothes to-night and I must be repaid."

Blue Bonnet caught the twinkle now and laughed as she waved them adieu. "If we don't hurry we won't get there at all," she said, and left them for Uncle Cliff, whom she at last spied.

It was a little over two hours later that John again saw Blue Bonnet, and the vision that met his eyes held him entranced. He had never seen her in full evening dress: the little gowns she wore at home were all simple, for she had not been presented to society.

To-night she was radiant, and John fancied as he watched her walk down the long aisle formed by soldiers and the California Grays to the receiving line, that Mary Louise Shravens had had a hand in selecting the beautiful gown that graced the girlish figure.

He could scarcely have described the dress, save that there was a hint of gold under the billowy tulle

that formed the overdress. The turquoise blue that mingled with it brought out the color of her eyes, reminding him of clear Italian waters with the mid-day sun upon them: there was the same lucid depth, and the same sparkle. Her only ornament was an ivory fan rich with yellow plumes.

Randall Patterson walked directly behind her, not unmindful of the picture she made, nor of the flattering remarks that now and then came to his ears. He was at his best, too, tall and handsome, with *savoir faire* that bespoke familiarity with the social world. They made a handsome and attractive pair, John could but admit as his eyes followed them.

Mary Louise preceded Blue Bonnet. She was lovely in a white gown — her wedding dress — and gracious, as always.

John and Knight fell into line and followed the others through the brilliant, flanked line of soldiers, up to the guests of honor who formed the receiving line. They had scarcely paid their respects — which took some time, for it was necessary to begin with the president of the exposition, the major general of the Presidio, the governor and his staff, and continue down the line of congressmen and senators from all parts of the country — when they made their way directly to Blue Bonnet. Randall was about to whirl her off in a one-step, but he paused long enough to allow John and Knight to

engage their dances. He seemed rather surprised at their demands.

The evening had not well started before Blue Bonnet realized that John and Knight were giving Randall a run. She rather enjoyed the fun of it for a while and shared her dances generously, but when Knight most adroitly detained her on the balcony for a half hour pointing out celebrities on the floor below, and making her miss several dances with Randall, she deemed it time to call a halt.

She had scarcely been delivered from the hands of Knight when John claimed the privilege of showing her the gardens. She hesitated, for Randall stood in the background with pleading eyes; but she had promised John to see some special decorations, and a promise was a promise.

It took an unconscionable length of time for John to find the exact spot he had in mind, and, when he did, it was but polite to remain and enjoy it for a minute. But in so doing she missed two more dances with Randall. She went back out of patience and a little upset.

Blue Bonnet was always for the under dog. She felt that she had not been quite fair to Randall, and when she entered the ballroom it was with the firm resolve to give him her entire attention. She offered him three straight dances to compensate for the ones he had lost, and then, in the presence of John, insisted upon showing him the beauties of the

forbidden garden which they had just found so entrancing. The next half hour the ballroom saw nothing of her.

Knight grew a little weary of the game by midnight and went back to the hotel, but John, hoping for one more dance and a word with Blue Bonnet, wandered for the second time out into the garden.

It was a beautiful night and he strolled through one path after another, smoking and thinking. He wondered afterward what trick of fate led him to an unexplored portion where the path divided to meet again beneath a group of palms. He found a deserted bench and sat down to finish his cigar and enjoy the peace and beauty of the surroundings.

He had been seated but a moment when he was conscious of voices. They came from the other side of the path, the one that diverged beyond the palms. Through the leaves he caught sight of filmy draperies with a hint of gold, and an ivory fan swinging idly to and fro from a suspended ribbon. The feathers almost touched the ground so absorbed was the owner in the tall form that bent above her.

John looked about helplessly. He wanted to get away, to move beyond earshot, but the next sound made it impossible. Randall Patterson had caught Blue Bonnet's hand and was speaking. The words came clear and direct:

"Please, Blue Bonnet — say yes. Let me speak with your uncle to-morrow."

“ Well — *yes.*” The words were scarcely audible. “ But perhaps I had better speak with him — *first.*”

Randall stooped and kissed the imprisoned hand. They moved away silently, lost to sight.

John Churchill watched the figures disappearing down the path like one in a dream. The peace of the place was gone — it had vanished. A horrible din sounded in his ears. Hammers beat; bewildering sounds alien to the night filled his senses. And out of the chaos, over and over again, came Blue Bonnet’s voice as he had heard it earlier in the evening, lifted a trifle in annoyance:

“ I asked him because I like him. If that isn’t sufficient I *could* give you another reason. *I could give you another reason!*”

He rose and walked a few paces down the path and then came back, scarcely realizing that he had left the bench at all. He sat down wearily, dropping his head in his hands. He suddenly felt old — as if his youth had been snatched from him. Only a moment ago life had seemed so full — now it was so empty; empty and worthless.

He looked up after a while and his eyes seemed puzzled. The music from the ballroom floated out to him. Why was it so melancholy? They were playing a dirge — no; it was “ America.” Of course — he remembered — it was a Congressional ball, and it was over — done with — like his hopes.

He rose mechanically and leaned against the bench until the last strains died away, his head bared to the cooling wind that swept in from the bay. Then he sat down again — sat for an hour or more — thinking — wondering — pondering. . . .

What a fool he had been not to see how things were drifting. Patterson had been Blue Bonnet's shadow ever since he arrived in San Francisco. He had besieged her with attentions last spring after she returned from the South. And somehow — he had fancied that she was bored with him . . . *bored* . . . that she preferred *his* society. . . . They had spent so many happy days together by the sea — in the old living-room — relic of his boyhood . . . the room that always seemed to hold the spirit of his mother. And now . . . Patterson. . . .

The thought must have been intolerable, for he shuddered, and, rising, followed the path that led to the gates.

But when he reached the hotel he did not go to bed. He found a deep chair in the lounge and buried himself in it, sitting until the small hours, exhausting his supply of cigars as well as his nerve force.

It was very late when he discovered that the chair next to him was occupied, and he glanced at his neighbor wonderingly. The young man's oblivion equaled his own. His speculative blue eyes had a far-off look.

But there was something in the way he held his head that awakened old memories. Churchill wondered where he had seen that fair hair that rippled off the forehead in a fashion all his own — the keen direct gaze.

He knew presently. A second later he had drawn his chair closer and put out his hand in a friendly grasp.

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Breakfast at the hotel was the one meal that the family had intact. It was seldom a single member of the party was absent. They met to get an early start to the Exposition grounds.

But the morning after the ball, two faces were missing. Mrs. White's headache was but little better, and John Churchill had not yet made his appearance.

"I feel worried about Mrs. White," Miss Clyde said, tasting her grapefruit brimming with juice. "She hasn't seemed at all well since she spent that afternoon at the Presidio with one of her old friends. She came home looking pale and ill. Something must have upset her."

Blue Bonnet's eyes were fixed on the table, though it was doubtful whether she noticed the charming flowers or the pleasant gleam that struck from the polished silver and glass.

"Wake up, Blue Bonnet, and tell us about the

ball. Ended with fireworks, I suppose?" It was Knight who spoke.

"No; it ended with 'America.'"

"You had a corking time — of course? That goes without saying."

Blue Bonnet did not answer. Her eyes were on the door, and her glance strayed from it to the vacant chair opposite.

"What's the matter, Honey?" Uncle Cliff asked. "Did you dance too much? You seem tired."

"I am, a little, Uncle Cliff. It's sort of adding insult to injury to walk all day and dance all night."

"Why didn't you take a chair at the grounds?"

"Uncle Cliff! Do you think I'd be hauled round in one of those things? What are my feet for?"

It was Sarah who discovered John's absence, and spoke of it.

"Where's Mr. Churchill this morning?" she asked. "He's never late."

"Why, that's so, he isn't here, is he?" Mr. Ashe seemed surprised. "What's the matter with him, Judson?"

Knight and John had adjoining rooms.

"John's having a little excitement. He ran across an old friend last night — or this morning rather; they sat up until the small hours talking over old times. De Valle, the daredevil aeroplane man. They were at Oxford together. Churchill's going to fly with him this morning."

The falling of Blue Bonnet's knife and fork sounded like an avalanche, so heavy was the silence.

"In an aëroplane!" Aunt Lucinda gasped. "With that De Valle who takes all those chances up in the air with dips and fancy flourishes?"

"The same, Miss Clyde."

"Why, how extraordinary! I should never have dreamed that Mr. Churchill would care for that sort of thing."

"Oh, he's very fond of all sorts of sports."

Mr. Ashe looked a trifle uneasy.

"I suppose he knows what he's doing," he said slowly. "Churchill's pretty clear-headed, but there's a stiff wind this morning for flying, isn't there?"

"Yes, there is, rather, but" (this after Knight caught Blue Bonnet's terrified expression) "De Valle isn't going to take any chances with an old friend in the car."

"I don't know about that," Sarah remarked, adding an extra lump of sugar to her coffee. "The way he loops the loop up in the air is something awful. Only yesterday I was standing near some people who were watching him and I heard them say they expected to see him killed any day."

"Cheerful optimists," Knight observed.

"Why, come to think of it, I believe it is this morning that he's advertised to do something he's never done before; *something*"—Sarah hesitated

with a puzzled frown — “oh, yes, I remember now: he’s going to do a vertical figure eight way up in the air — ever so much higher than he’s ever been yet, and a new kind of a loop — something he does with a swoop and the machine turns completely over.”

Miss Clyde raised her eyes in horror.

“The present generation holds life very lightly,” she remarked, addressing no one in particular.

“But you don’t suppose that John would be so foolish as to — to let this man experiment while he was in the car, do you? He’s probably just going up for the novelty, isn’t he, Knight? I’d like to myself.”

Blue Bonnet tried to hold her tone even, but it was anxious nevertheless.

“Oh, that’s all, I’m sure.”

“What time were they to start?”

“At ten, I believe — or somewhere round there.”

Sarah pricked up her ears.

“At ten? Then he *is* going up when De Valle does those freakish things. That was the hour the paper mentioned.”

Blue Bonnet made the merest pretense of eating the hot cakes which she had buttered with care, and drew her finger bowl closer.

“If you will all excuse me,” she said, “I’ll run up and see how Mrs. White is this morning. And, Uncle Cliff — if you don’t mind — I think I won’t

go out to the Exposition until noon. I want to get some things in Chinatown to send to the girls at home. I'll meet you at the usual place at lunch time."

She was gone before he could protest or nod assent.

Mrs. White was better, but pale and wan. There was a sad haunting look in her eyes that worried Blue Bonnet. Twice she was on the point of asking if something troubled her, but it seemed inquisitive and she hesitated. She refrained from telling her about John lest that, too, might worry her.

Chinatown was not half so interesting as usual, and Wo Song, smiling and eager to please, followed her from one counter to another in a fruitless endeavor to sell.

"I think I'll come again in the morning," she said, to his evident disappointment. "I've no doubt but that I'll take those old embroideries for trays, and the Canton plates, but I don't want to decide now."

He held the door open for her to pass out into the street and watched her as she loitered, glancing into the shop of Lo Hung, his nearest competitor.

"Something wrong, Mees Ashe to-day," he said to Ti Hwang, who was busy putting back the rejected embroideries. "She buy nothing. All a time buy velly much — to-day she like nothing!"

Wo Song shook his head sympathetically.

At Lo Hung's it was the same. The kimonos looked loud and tawdry, and she passed them by with an idle glance. If the bronzes displayed so artistically had been gold, she would have scorned them.

"I am just looking to-day," she said to the willing little niece of Lo Hung who helped in the store. "I'll come again before I leave the city."

As she went out the door a gust of wind gave her hat such a twist that it took both hands to set it right. She put the hat pin through more securely and pulled her veil tighter, giving it an extra twist under her chin. Then she looked at her watch. *It was just ten o'clock.*

She stood still in the street, the skirt of her blue serge walking skirt blowing and twisting about her ankles. A young Chinese girl passed her, trim and neat in blue trousers. She seemed quite oblivious to the weather and her step was free and untrammelled. Blue Bonnet watched her for a minute, almost enviously. She seemed so superior in her modest attire, so independent of the elements.

Blue Bonnet started up the hill, but the wind almost carried her off her feet.

"He never can do it in this wind," she said; "*never!* It would be courting death."

For a moment she hardly knew what to do. She didn't want to go to the Exposition grounds — yet. There was nothing to do at the hotel. She finally

decided on the hotel and pulled up the steep hill with an effort.

Mrs. White was sleeping. Blue Bonnet opened her door ever so carefully to make sure, and then sat down in her own room to think. All at once she rose and went over to her desk. She had forgotten that she had an engagement with Randall for eleven o'clock. Perhaps she could catch him at his hotel. She turned to the telephone, and then back again to the desk. She preferred to write — she felt a little annoyed with him. He had been too much encouraged by her favors last night and presumed a little. She had granted him a request, promised to do something that he very much wanted to do and — well, he had shown a little more feeling than the occasion demanded, that was all. But it irritated her.

The note was soon finished. It merely said that she could not keep her engagement, and that on second thought she preferred that he would not speak with her uncle about the excursion to Mill Valley. She was a little tired for tramping through the woods. If he would call about four in the afternoon she would see him and explain further.

She sealed the note and rang for a messenger.

When she had changed the serge suit for a one-piece dress and donned a heavy coat she started forth again, this time for the Exposition grounds.

She was early. Her uncle had not yet arrived.

She took up her station near the front entrance of the Horticultural Building to watch for him. The wind soon drove her inside, and she found a seat near some young people who were having their sliced pineapple and coffee rather early.

Scraps of their conversation drifted toward her. She paid little attention at first, but just as they were leaving she heard one of the girls say, "Oh, all the fools aren't dead yet. De Valle's left. He actually started to make the trip advertised for this morning, in spite of the wind, and took a man up with him. They only got well started when —"

Blue Bonnet heard no more. The girl had passed out of sight and she was left to her own torturing imaginings.

CHAPTER IX

A HASTY DEPARTURE

THE wind, which had risen to a fury by noon, died down at four in the afternoon, and dark ominous clouds suggested rain.

John Churchill stood before an open trunk in his bedroom and gazed into the empty tray, unmindful of the weather. He stooped, man-fashion with bent knees, and thoughtfully regarded a pile of linen and underwear that lay on the floor; then he reached for some shirts absently and threw them into the tray. Underwear and socks followed in sad confusion. When he had filled the small compartment to the brim he took everything out and began over again — this time with greater consideration for the shirts.

For more than half a day now, he had been doing things in this desultory fashion; dazed, uncertain, knowing only that he wanted to live fast, crowd the hours to the brim with work or reckless daring until he could reach Boston, and bury himself in business that would be all-absorbing.

He finished packing presently and let the lid to the trunk fall forward with a bang. Then he

changed his clothes, brushed his coat to a satisfactory neatness, and rang the bell for a boy.

When the boy arrived he handed him a card. "Take this to Miss Ashe," he said, "and ask her if she will see me in her parlor for a few minutes as soon as possible."

The boy was not long in returning.

"Miss Ashe is in her parlor now, Mr. Churchill, and will see you."

Churchill paused on the threshold of Blue Bonnet's reception-room, but his pride made him go forward. Randall Patterson was making an afternoon call. He sat in a deep, comfortable chair, his long limbs stretched lazily.

Churchill accepted the chair which Blue Bonnet provided.

Patterson took the initiative.

"What's all this we hear about your takin' to flyin'?" He had the same rather fascinating manner of clipping his final g's that belonged to Mary Louise.

"Yes," Blue Bonnet said, "you gave us all a horrible turn this morning when Knight announced that you were going up with Mr. De Valle."

"I appreciate being of so much importance," Churchill replied with a smile.

"I suppose it was the wind that prevented your getting far?" Blue Bonnet's tone was inquisitive.

"Yes — unfortunately."

"But you really did make the start?"

"Yes — an attempt."

"And frightened several hundred people out of their wits. One hardly needed a flying machine this morning. I almost expected to be lifted bodily myself."

"This De Valle," Patterson remarked, shifting his position to a more comfortable one, "is an interesting fellow, I'm told. Know him well, do you?"

"Rather. We had some work together at Oxford a few years ago."

"I understand he's something of a black sheep — belongs to a fine old family?"

"He's the second son of a French gentleman who married an English woman of renown, I believe. As to his being a black sheep, I couldn't say. He gave great promise in the line of science at the university, but he always had this airship bee buzzing."

Blue Bonnet leaned back in her chair and regarded John wonderingly. What had come over him so suddenly? He looked tired — almost ill. His eyes, usually bright, lacked luster, and she almost fancied he was under a strain. What was the matter with *everybody*? Mrs. White was miserable, too.

Outside the storm broke. Drops pelted the window pane.

"This is a sort of grand finale to our departure Saturday, isn't it?" Blue Bonnet remarked.

"I think it was specially designed for me," Churchill said slowly. "I shall have to leave to-night. I came to tell you."

"To-night! What has happened?"

"Something came up — quite unexpectedly."

Patterson had the courtesy to rise. "I think I must be going," he said, viewing the weather through the window.

"But you can't," Blue Bonnet said — "not in this weather. It's raining pitchforks!"

"And it will for the next twenty-four hours. I'd better go while I can."

He gathered up his gloves and cane from the table where they lay beside some gorgeous flowers, and put out his hand to John.

"Good-by, old man," he said; "sorry you have to pull out like this, but it's an ill wind that blows nobody good. I'm to have your berth in the 'Sunset.' Miss Ashe has honored me with an invitation to the ranch."

"Yes," Blue Bonnet added hastily, "Mr. and Mrs. Shravens are coming with us, and I asked Randall, too. I've warned them that they won't find an estate like Bellevue, their own place. The ranch is primitive. We like to keep it that way — we enjoy getting away from civilization once in a while and — conventions."

Blue Bonnet curled up in the seat Randall vacated.

"Won't you sit down?" she said to John, who was still standing. "Your train doesn't leave — right away, does it?"

"Thank you, if I'm not keeping you. No; I go at midnight. It is quite impossible for me to tell you how I have enjoyed this trip with you and your uncle." He paused, unable to express his appreciation of the kindness that had been shown him. "I haven't words to thank you."

"Please don't try. The pleasure has been ours. We loved having you. It seems too bad that you have to leave before we do, but if the weather is going to act like this I suppose it doesn't matter very much after all."

"The weather never matters if you are in pleasant company."

"Yes — that's true. And yet, I'm very mercurial. I go up and down with sunshine and showers just like a barometer. I've felt as if the elements were on a regular rampage to-day and that I was in league with them!"

There was silence for a moment and then:

"I suppose it's this case coming up — the one that means so much to you — that's hurrying you so?"

Churchill confessed to its importance.

"Oh, dear, I do hope you will win it. It would mean so much to you — such a feather in your cap!"

Her interest was so genuine — she was so eager — that John's heart gave a bound. He managed to show his appreciation somehow.

“And would you be too busy — would it bother you awfully to go out to the Home some day soon and let me know how it is coming on? I feel so anxious —”

John interrupted her with an exclamation.

“That reminds me. I have a letter here somewhere from Fanny Howell. There is a message for you.”

He ran through several papers in his pocket, finally extracting a letter in a square envelope. It took him some time to wade through the finely written pages for the message, and Blue Bonnet marveled.

“Oh, from Fanny?” she managed to say. “Do you correspond with her? She's been horrid about writing me.”

“She apologizes for it here — wait a minute; yes, this is it: ‘Tell Blue Bonnet that I am very much ashamed of not having written her as I promised, but I have not been so remiss in other ways. Have visited the Home often and carried out her instructions. Please tell her that the breakfast-room has been properly widened, and is a joy. I know she will be pleased. Everything is going along beautifully, the weather behaving so well that much has been accomplished. Mr. Feganza thinks

there is no doubt but that the building will be ready for occupancy by the first of the year.' ”

“ Yes; so he wrote me,” Blue Bonnet said, watching him as he folded the letter carefully, returning it to his pocket. She wondered what those other five or six sheets could possibly contain of interest.

“ You are very fond of Fanny, aren't you? ” she ventured after a moment's pause.

“ Fan? Oh, yes! We've been pals ever since I wore knickers. She's great fun. Her attitude toward life is more like a man's than a woman's. You're never afraid of her misunderstanding.”

“ I see; sort of a man's woman.”

“ Exactly.”

“ Sort of a chum, I suppose you mean? ”

“ A comrade — yes. Always dependable.”

“ But you'd hardly call her pretty? ”

“ No — oh, no; rather more attractive, don't you think? ”

Blue Bonnet conjured up a vision of Fanny Howell through half closed eyes: tall, rather boyishly built, with a charming head well poised; straight slender shoulders; keen hazel eyes overflowing with tenderness; long limbs, rather large narrow feet always incased in ground gripper shoes with half inch heels.

“ I think you'd know she was from Boston — if you met her in the dark,” she said presently.

“ She's quite typical.”

John beamed as if she were paying Boston a compliment.

"She looks — *culture*: as if she could quote Emerson by the ream, and tell you the identical moment the Pilgrims landed."

"I'm not sure but that she could," John admitted.

"And she's *very* conventional — *very*, though she thinks she isn't."

"It's too bad she has that blight — it seems to be fastened on Bostonians, doesn't it?"

Blue Bonnet felt a little ashamed. "She's a dear, anyway," she announced in the next breath. "I quite dote on her."

"In spite of her New England inheritance? Conventions and traditions?"

"Oh, I like traditions."

"But not conventions."

"I'm not crazy about them."

The conversation drifted to Gabriel, there were numerous messages, and then John rose.

"We'll see you at dinner, of course?" Blue Bonnet asked.

"Yes, indeed."

"And to-night — you have no engagement?"

"None, I assure you."

"Then if this storm stops we might have a last peek at Chinatown together, mightn't we?"

"I should enjoy it very much."

Blue Bonnet went back to her bedroom to dress for dinner a little dazed. The world — her world at least — had suddenly turned topsy turvy.

As she dressed she wondered . . . wondered about many things. Why John Churchill had decided to go home so suddenly? Why Fanny Howell was writing him such lengthy letters? Why his mood was so peculiar — so suddenly aloof, though she felt sure he had striven to be natural. Perhaps, after all, she imagined a great deal. Men were subject to business calls. She had known Uncle Cliff to leave the ranch for New York on an hour's notice.

She looked at her watch. It was only half-past five and dinner was at seven. There was time for a visit with Aunt Lucinda, whom she had been neglecting a bit in the stress of other things.

"I suppose you know that John's leaving for Boston to-night," she said when she had curled up comfortably for a chat.

"For Boston — *to-night!*" Miss Clyde looked amazed.

"Yes — business or something. He didn't say just what."

"I'm sorry. I've enjoyed him so much."

"Aunt Lucinda, I've invited Mr. and Mrs. Shravens to go on to the ranch with us. It was an excellent time to ask Mary Louise, for her husband has closed his studio in Paris and can't go back

until the war closes. They have a great deal of time on their hands."

"I should think he would be in France fighting if his interests are there."

"But he's an American, Aunt Lucinda."

"Why doesn't he live in America then?"

"Because opportunities are so much greater there — in his line of work anyway."

Miss Clyde was silent.

"And Randall is going with us, too — I couldn't very well leave him out when I asked his sister. I don't believe you like Randall, Aunt Lucinda."

"I think he is a very pleasant young man, but — rather idle, isn't he? Has he no profession?"

"Yes — he's an engineer — a civil engineer, you know. But he has an income, and he's never settled down. He will, he's really very clever; his mother told me so. We had a long talk about him one day in Nashville."

"How old is he?"

"Twenty-seven or eight."

"Don't you think he had better begin soon?"

"Yes, I do, Aunt Lucinda. I don't like an idle man."

"He's very attractive," came from the corner where Sarah was sewing by the low electric light. Sarah was always somewhere near Miss Clyde.

It was still raining when Blue Bonnet went back



" IT WAS AFTER EIGHT WHEN JOHN FOUND HER "

to her own room, but she got out one of her prettiest gowns and proceeded to dress leisurely.

Her mirror reflected a very charming person when she was at last ready; her short white, new old-fashioned gown made her look like the quaint girl of the early sixties that hung in the deep gold frame in Cousin Augusta's drawing-room. There were yards and yards of white ruffles edged with dainty lace, and the simple bertha that crossed so demurely on the bodice was caught with Grandmother Clyde's cameo brooch.

Dinner was not the merry affair that it usually was. Mrs. White was back in her accustomed place, but she still looked ill, and Knight was as sober as a judge.

Blue Bonnet was glad when the dessert was served and she was free to go upstairs while the men lingered over their cigars.

It was after eight when John found her. She was standing by the window watching the raindrops which were gradually diminishing.

"Do you think we can make it?" he inquired.

"Yes — don't you? I'll just get a big coat and some rubbers. Will you wait just a minute?"

She was back presently, wrapped in a long blue velvet coat that fell in ripples to the hem of her gown. John thought he had never seen her more beautiful, or more eager.

"I *must* see the old apothecary once more," she

said as they made their way down the steep hill at the back of the hotel, "and Ah Tom!"

She clung to John's arm to get the shelter of his umbrella and chatted every step of the way.

"Here we are," she said as they paused before the window that framed the apothecary. "He's writing. Look at Ah Tom snuggled in the bend of his arm. Isn't that a picture?"

She studied the face for a long time; she wanted to think of it when she was far away; it would bring so many visions of Chinatown that were delightful.

Wo Song's shop was all that could be desired. Blue Bonnet lingered over the Canton plates. The kimonos were lovely, too. She selected an exquisite pale blue one abloom with pink roses.

"This is for Amanda's chest," she explained, slipping off her evening coat to try it on. "I want to get the slippers to match!"

Wo Song brought such an array that John wondered how she made the choice, but she seemed satisfied and had the things sent to Amanda's address in Woodford.

When they left the shop the rain had ceased.

"Are you quite through now?" John enquired.

"I'm through shopping, yes, but I don't want to go back to the hotel. I love this damp air in my face and the shops all lighted so brilliantly. Let's walk round a bit."

The street was gay: full of color and light. Small, yellow-skinned women tripped along in brilliant kimonos with broad sashes, their black hair festive with ornaments. Children laughed and played on the sidewalk, thrusting baskets of sweets into faces that bent to inspect their wares.

Blue Bonnet paused at an alley and glanced down. Groups of Chinese women chatted pleasantly. A woman — well past middle age — paused at a flower stand and searched through a basket of fragrant beauties until she found what she wanted. Then she toddled off — down into the little dark lane that led from the street and disappeared from sight.

For several minutes Blue Bonnet stood watching the crowd. She touched John lightly on the arm.

“See that perfectly fascinating girl with the scarlet kimono and the rhinestones in her hair,” she whispered. “I think she must be going to a party — oh, she is — and see! there’s a man waiting for her at the corner.”

Sure enough. She met him shyly, turning back to see if any one were looking. He searched the street, too, for a second with his quick black eyes, and then they passed on, turning a corner quickly.

“I suppose they have their — romances — the same as other people,” Blue Bonnet said, still gazing at the place where they had stood. “And he probably thinks she’s ravishing in that love of a kimono.”

“Probably.”

“ People seem to be alike the world over.”

“ Very much.”

“ They have their joys and their sorrows.”

There was no answer, but Blue Bonnet scarcely noticed, for an irate Chinese woman had appeared on the scene. She was old and severe; her kimono plain and unattractive. She was angry — very angry, and she talked in a loud tone to some of her own countrymen who stood, smiling, at the corner.

“ Oh, I wish I knew what she was saying,” Blue Bonnet said, watching her. Then a light broke over her face. “ Oh, I know — I’m sure! That was her daughter. She was going out with the young man against her mother’s wishes. See, she’s looking for her up the street. Dear me, I hope she won’t catch her while she’s in that mood.”

So she prattled on, interested in the merest detail that came her way, entering into the joys and tragedies of the Chinese world as thoroughly as if they were her own.

“ I believe you are interested in humanity at large,” John remarked.

“ Not any more than you are,” she answered with a smile. “ Confess, now. You’d like to know if that woman finds her daughter — if it is her daughter. Wouldn’t you? It’s just like reading the first installment of a story. Life’s hardly worth living until you get the next issue. When I lose my en-

thusiasm for — for *things* and for *people* I don't want to live. It's interest in what's going on around you that makes life worth living."

And Churchill knew that she had found the keynote of happiness.

By the time they reached the hotel the skies had cleared and the stars were twinkling. They paused for a moment to say good-by.

"You won't forget all my messages, will you," Blue Bonnet said, "and have a look at the Home often, if you can? I don't want to impose, for I know you will be so busy."

"It will always be a pleasure to do what I can for you. *Always* — please remember that."

"Thank you. And give my love to Fanny. Of course you will see her soon."

"I hope to."

There was a pause, and Blue Bonnet realized suddenly that she had been making all the effort at conversation. It vexed her. What was the matter — surely something. The old camaraderie, the spirit of familiarity and good-will that had existed between them, had vanished. Try as she would she could not coax it back.

"I won't keep you any longer," she said, a little aloof, and held out her hand in parting.

Churchill's fingers closed over hers warmly.

"I hope you will keep well — and happy," he added.

She looked up in surprise. Something in his tone made her wonder.

“I am always well,” she reminded him, “and if I were any happier — I don’t believe I could stand it. Good-by — please don’t forget my messages, especially to Gabriel and Carita.”

She looked back after she had reached the elevator. He was gazing after her with eyes a little dazed. She nodded and waved her hand slightly, and then the elevator door slid forward with a click, giving her the feeling that a door had closed between them.

CHAPTER X

CARMEL-BY-THE-SEA

It was the very day after John Churchill had left for Boston that Mary Louise Shravens upset Blue Bonnet's plans for departure to the ranch.

"Honey," she said, running in on Blue Bonnet a little before dinner, "I have some bad news — bad for me, anyway. A horrid man has offered Felix his studio for two months somewhere down the coast, and Felix has accepted it because this village — Carmel-by-the-Sea, they call it — is where all the artists go to paint, and Felix is wild to get some marine views. I'm so put out about it; but I don't want to be selfish. It really is an opportunity."

"And you can't go on to the ranch with us?" Blue Bonnet said, crestfallen.

"Not just now, Honey. I'm so sorry! But I have a beautiful plan. Come over here a minute."

She drew Blue Bonnet to a wide seat and took her hand affectionately. "Come with us to the sea for a while," she begged. "The ranch will keep. There is a charming Inn where we are going; the wind sings in the pine-trees and the ocean pounds at your very door. Please, won't you?"

"But, Uncle Cliff —" Blue Bonnet began.

“Honey, that’s easy! He’s always for anything that will make you happy. Come, I’ll introduce the subject and then you can talk to him. That’s the way we always did at home. I paved the way and Randall argued.”

“Uncle Cliff never argues; he’s always *for* or *against*!”

As usual, Uncle Cliff was ready to do anything to add to Blue Bonnet’s pleasure and happiness. He said so frankly.

“There’s no reason in the world why you shouldn’t go, Blue Bonnet. It would be an opportunity for you all to see something of the Pacific coast. You would enjoy it.”

“And how about you?”

“I think Knight and I had better be getting on to the ranch. But that needn’t interfere with your plans. It isn’t long until Christmas. We will be together then.”

So it was arranged, and, instead of turning southward, the party with the exception of Mr. Ashe and Knight, set out for the little town beside the sea.

Blue Bonnet loved Carmel the moment she saw it — in fact before, for the approach along the sea and through the woods foretold the joys ahead.

The automobile road from Monterey — (Carmel was off the main line and could be reached only by stage) — led through forests of pine-trees that grew almost to the ocean’s edge. Sometimes the road

left the trees and wound around yellow, sunburned hills, bare, save for occasional wind-blown oaks, sturdy and picturesque.

Blue Bonnet caught her breath sharply. How beautiful it all was — and peaceful after the roar and hum of the big city they had just left. She glanced with delight at the bright beach flowers along the way and drew in deep draughts of sweet sea-scented air.

“Look at those saucy monkey flowers nodding to you, Aunt Lucinda,” she cried. “Think of daring to flaunt their faces in *November!*” A little farther along pink and lavender verbenas sprawled in the sand contentedly, and the tar weed contributed fragrance.

The Pine Inn was quite simple after the splendid Fairmont; but Blue Bonnet reveled in the rustic living-room and the simple home-made furnishings. She sat down on the side of the little wooden bed in her room and looked about. The walls were built of timber, but dainty white curtains hung at the windows that gave to the sea, and the hickory rocking-chair, the cunning candlesticks cut from a pine branch, were charming.

There was something about the atmosphere of the place that reminded her of the ranch. She felt free; there were no conventions to hedge her in, no shams and pretenses; everything was natural and honest.

"The room only needs a book or two, a few photographs and a table cover to make it ideal," she thought, and straightway proceeded to provide the necessary articles from her trunk.

Blue Bonnet could not live in a room ten minutes without giving it something of her own personality. She put out two or three books; "Ramona," which she wished to reread under California skies; a little volume of Robert Louis Stevenson's essays; a couple of new novels. When she had set them in the rustic shelf between the windows, thrown a soft Oriental scarf over the table, put out her father's and her mother's pictures in the silver frames, she felt quite settled.

She was a little late in entering the living-room. The rest of the party had gathered for dinner. A cheerful log burned on the huge hearth and the family had gathered round it.

"We have been having a beautiful time watching the celebrities," Sarah whispered as she made a place on the bench beside her. "Randall says this is the home of the highbrow. They all come here to write or to paint or something. Like as not you'll find your favorite author sitting near you at dinner. See that fascinating man Mr. Shravens is talking with? That's the man who painted 'The Lady in Gray' we all loved at the Exposition." A glow of pride lighted Sarah's face. It was quite wonderful to be breathing the same air with such a notable.

"Do you suppose they eat," Randall asked, nodding to a little coterie standing near, "or is it a perpetual flow of soul? Shall we dine?"

He led the way into the dining-room, perfectly at ease among the elect, and extremely good to look upon in the white flannels which he had donned.

Blue Bonnet was rather silent as she ate, watching the faces about her. She knew that Carmel was a rendezvous for a number of the literati — both native and visiting — and that the hotel and bungalow salons were exclusive and interesting.

When Blue Bonnet returned to her room later in the evening she threw open the window and stood gazing for a moment at the sea. The air, fragrant with the odor of pines, floated in pleasantly. Only a stone's throw away the ocean pounded and the waves broke in snowy surf on the white sand.

"Sea and stars, forests and flowers," she thought, and heaved a little fluttering sigh. She wondered why she was sighing in the midst of so much beauty. There was nothing lacking. Nothing? Yes — there was. She hesitated to admit it — even to herself. She wanted to share the glories with some one who appreciated — understood. How John Churchill would have delighted in the woods they passed through this afternoon — the long reach of gray green sea, the evening primroses nodding by the roadside — the forest trees etched against the silvery mist that floated through the branches.

She was up early the next morning, fresh and bright as the day itself. She had explored several walks and byways when Randall appeared on the veranda.

"My, but you're lazy!" she admonished. "You've lost two perfectly good hours."

Randall selected a deep wicker chair, carefully brushed the seat with a spotless handkerchief and sank down cozily.

"May I smoke?" he asked.

"Dear me, yes; haven't I told you never to ask?"

Randall watched her through half closed eyes contentedly.

"What's the plan for the morning?" he asked, settling back comfortably.

"I'm going to help Mary Louise arrange things in the studio — get settled. You should see it — a love of a place."

"You haven't been there already?"

"Surely. It's not far. There's a fine tennis court at the back. Will you play this afternoon?"

"Let me get acclimated, Blue Bonnet."

"Randall, you're lazy. It's the only thing I don't like about you."

"Really? I'm flattered. I fancied that was a minor fault."

"But sometimes one big fault obscures a lot of virtues — at any rate, it dwarfs them."

"That's a charming gown you have on, Blue Bonnet. You should always wear white."

"Don't think you can turn the conversation with a compliment. Some day I want to talk with you quite seriously."

"I have had the same thought, Blue Bonnet. But I want a nice quiet spot. This veranda is too public for what I have to say."

Blue Bonnet got up and shook out the plaits in her white wool skirt.

"This is a dreadful place on clothes," she said, ignoring the remark. "Everything is in a thousand wrinkles. Good-by. I'll see you at lunch."

"You'll see me now," he answered. "I'm going with you. Don't you think I ought to lend a hand to Mary Louise?"

"Can you drive tacks and move furniture?"

"Hammering's my specialty. Haven't you noticed it?"

The studio was attractive. The long living-room faced the sea, and from the large south window one caught a glimpse of blue mountains half veiled in mist.

Mary Louise was enveloped in a studio apron, which she had found on a peg behind the door, a dust-cloth in her hands.

"Welcome, Honey," she said, kissing Blue Bonnet's cool cheek. "Felix is off painting, already."

I shan't have any more husband than if I were a spinster, for the next two months. Don't marry an artist, Blue Bonnet, or a writer, or an actor. Marry a man who's content to stay around a little —"

"Take me, Blue Bonnet," Randall interrupted. "I can qualify."

Mary Louise bestowed a kiss on the handsome brown face bending above her and ran her fingers through the kinky hair.

"You'd be just as bad, Ran. You'd stay round *all* the time. There's a happy medium."

"Then you will not consider my proposition, Blue Bonnet?"

But Blue Bonnet was following Mary Louise into the one other room the cottage boasted and did not deign to answer.

Mary Louise pointed out the attractions of the house.

"There isn't room for a servant," she said, "but as long as we can get our dinners at the hotel it doesn't matter. I'm going to try my hand at cooking breakfast. Felix won't be home to lunch. It's rather ideal for honeymooning, isn't it?"

Blue Bonnet took the apron Mary Louise found for her and slipped it on dreamily.

"It certainly is," she answered long after Mary Louise had forgotten the remark. "There couldn't be anything more wonderful than to share the beau-

ties of this place with one you love. I think I'm homesick for Uncle Cliff."

Randall threw up his hands in despair.

"I've offered my services in every capacity, and been systematically turned down."

"I know, Randall, you're most obliging," Blue Bonnet said, "and I'm more appreciative than you think, but I don't want an admirer, I want a companion."

A hungry light leaped to the man's dark eyes.

"And can I never be that?" The presence of his sister seemed to make little difference.

"I'm afraid not."

"Is it because —"

Mary Louise came to the rescue.

"Why don't you children choose a moonlight night down by the water for these arguments. Get a launch or a boat — it helps a lot. Honey" — this to Randall — "take yourself off and smoke. Blue Bonnet's going to help me unpack. I might as well get out everything we brought and be comfy. Felix won't budge from this village until he's painted everything in sight."

"In that event I'll wander down to the beach."

Randall took his hat from the chair where he had dropped it, looked into it thoughtfully for a minute, then settled it on his head. Blue Bonnet watched him as he sauntered leisurely down to the shore.

CHAPTER XI

MRS. WHITE RECEIVES A LETTER

MRS. WHITE sat on the hotel veranda, her knees comfortably wrapped in a steamer rug, a silk motor hat pulled well over her eyes. The pretty blue sweater that buttoned snugly about her throat gave her an extremely girlish appearance. Sometimes Alicia White's eyes were blue, sometimes they were gray; sometimes, in some lights, they were sea green. This morning they were blue — and misty.

A pile of letters lay in her lap. One from Gabriel, one from Carita; the third bore a foreign postmark. Each had been read carefully. She was going over the foreign letter for the third time, trying to comprehend the meaning of the words. Not that they were illegible; the writing was plain enough. She was trying to realize — dumbly, the effect those few lines would have on her future life.

The letter was dated the twenty-second of October, and sent from a small village in France. It read:

“DEAR ALICIA:

“No doubt after all these years you will have the surprise of your life in hearing from me. I

got your address from your erstwhile aunt, who has always kept somewhere within signaling distance of me, which is more than I can say for you. Well — I can't blame you. I was something of a brute in the old days; but we'll let that pass.

"Valeria said you were at the Fairmont, in San Francisco, with a party of notables, traveling in a private car, so I take it you landed on your feet, after all. I'm not surprised. There was always a magnetic spark in you that attracted. It got me once. I often think of the old days — I have ample time at night here in the trenches with bullets sailing by and Zeppelins thundering overhead. I have just missed death twice, and will, no doubt, answer the call, yet. Once it was a shot in the left lung that sent me to the hospital for two months; the next time pneumonia from exposure.

"But the borderland of death brings its message. You can read the writing — *clear*. You realize in the long watches that your passport is a straight account with your fellow man — and you wish that you had been fair and decent. I guess that's why I'm writing to you, Alicia. I'd like to square the old account if possible — to tell you that I'm not all cad. When I heard that France needed men I gave my services. I left the United States army years ago — the life was too tame. France had contributed to the joys of my boy-

hood: I was glad to give my strength in her hour of need.

"The old days — our days together — often come back to me, and I think a lot about the little girl — the kiddie we lost. Perhaps if she had lived things might have been different. Still, I don't know. A man — *some men* have to sow wild oats: they don't often stop to consider the girl who shares the harvest.

"I hardly dare ask that you write to me. A letter in these awful times is worth its weight in gold. We hunger for a bit of news from — I was going to say home folks, but I haven't any. There isn't a soul in the world who will give a hang when my turn comes to go. Pleasant commentary on my life, isn't it? But I'm not whining. I can think of one or two things that lifted a burden here and there. It helps some.

"I may see you again — who knows? The chap who has fought by my side for months has never had a scratch. I, too, may come through. Valeria gave me the name of your friends — Ashes of Boston. If I ever get on the other side again I'll look you up. I suppose there are still telephone directories. Gad, one can scarcely believe there is anything left after viewing this carnage for a year."

Mrs. White looked long at the signature. It was clear and firm. Fighting in the trenches had

steadied, not weakened, Cranston White's nerves. She could recall the time when, after a prolonged debauch, his name, scratched to a penitent note, was illegible.

And so he was still living. Valeria Lenox had lost no time in acquainting him with her whereabouts. Alicia had known that she would, the moment she had run across her that day at the Exposition. There was a malicious note in her inquiry — a jealous gleam in her eyes. Valeria was never generous. She had hated Alicia from the moment her husband had brought her into their home. And to see her now, happy, well-dressed, set down in the lap of luxury, prettier than she had ever been in her life, aroused and added to the old antagonism.

That meeting with Valeria Lenox had set Alicia White back for days. It took the bloom from her cheeks, the sparkle from her eyes. The news that Cranston White was alive was not pleasant. For years she had thought of him as dead; swept out of her life at any rate, by a kind fate.

She had tried to hide the fear that tugged at her heart, the nervousness that was so apparent, under the guise of headaches, sudden colds, undue fatigue. Blue Bonnet, young and inexperienced in life's tragedies, believed and sympathized, but Mr. Ashe knew better — Alicia *knew* that he knew. Nothing escaped his cool, level eyes, his keen intuition.

For an hour she sat on the veranda, oblivious to

passers-by, her gaze fixed on the tall pine-trees that sheltered the wide country avenue.

Before those eyes scenes passed and shifted. Alicia White was a girl again; then a woman — a widow. She was looking back across the years, and for once the vision did not torture her. The letter had softened sorrow and outrage. For the first time in years she could look back on Cranston White as her lover, her husband — the father of her child, and not shrink.

The news that he had offered his services to France in her distress did not surprise her. She was fully aware of the streak of good that ran counter to the bad in his nature. She could recall many instances of his bravery. His impulses were generous. She marveled at his endurance in the trenches. It would seem that his physical condition would have made hardship impossible — unless he had braced up considerably, stopped his old indulgency.

And as she thought, gentler memories came to her. Finer things in his nature crowded out offenses: his love for children. She remembered with a rush of feeling that brought tears, how hard it had been for him to give up little Barbara — how passionate had been his grief. Even the terrible weeks that followed — when he was scarcely ever himself — faded out now in recalling his anguish.

She wondered if she had been quite fair with him,

and it was not the first time the thought had tormented her. Had she the right to leave him? To so completely sever the bond that had united them. For better, for worse — that was her promise. For better . . . for worse . . . She could hear the clergyman now as he gave the words and her own answer, clear above the strains of the chapel organ. For better . . . for worse . . . in *sickness* . . . and in *death*.

She had promised and failed of that promise. The thought was not comforting. She had blamed him for his shortcomings and disregarded her own responsibilities. And yet — few women could have endured what she had. Few? . . . Thousands were enduring more every day — and in silence.

There had been times when happiness reigned. Spasmodic periods between mad excesses: the honeymoon — those ecstatically happy days when she had been free from Valeria Lenox's manifold unkindnesses — safe in a home of her own.

How she had loved dressing up the barren army quarters: putting out the wedding gifts; hanging the dainty curtains — the pictures, with Cranston laughing down at her from his perch on the step-ladder above — laughing at her fussiness, her anxiety to have the pictures at just the proper angle.

And their little garden — what an interest he had taken in that: how he had hoed and raked and planted for her. Just the other day at the Presidio

she had noticed the sweet lavender with which they had bordered the little yard. It was still hardy and fragrant, and the heliotrope had reached the top of the porch and climbed on to the second-story windows.

How charming he had been in those days ; as eager as a boy in his fresh enthusiasm for all that pertained to the small ménage.

And there had been those blessed days before the coming of the little Barbara : he had been kind then, tender, except when the craving for drink had taken away his manhood.

As she sat there in the stillness of the morning Alicia White tried to justify herself. If the child had lived she would have kept the home . . . yes, for the sake of the little one. But, after she went, everything seemed useless . . . even her own ability.

And now he wanted to come back — that was clear. The letter was but an entering wedge — she could read between the lines.

She turned her eyes from the tree-tops wearily. They traveled out along the sea and rested there. Life for her had been a good deal like those waves ; hopes and ambitions had rolled in only to break in foam, vanishing at sight.

And the irony of it ! Just when the years of suffering had ceased and the future promised peace. When she was safe from poverty, happy and protected — even loved, the blow had fallen : she was

forced to turn and face duty ; battle with a conscience that would give her no peace day or night until she had struck for the right.

For just an instant another form rose before Alicia White's vision. It stood straight and tall beside Cranston White, dwarfing him to insignificance. The shoulders were broad and manly, the head erect, the eyes clear and kindly : the whole bearing capable and full of power.

Clifford Ashe always typified strength to her. She had been thrown with him a great deal of late. Blue Bonnet scarcely realized how much, for with the attention of John Churchill, Randall Patterson, and Knight, she had been kept busy.

Sarah was Miss Clyde's shadow, so that it became quite natural for Mr. Ashe to follow along with Mrs. White on sight-seeing expeditions. A friendship had sprung up between them ; a safe, sane friendship, possible only at middle age.

For a moment she wished that she might go to him with her problem, her trouble, as Blue Bonnet so often did with her worries. She longed for his wise counsel ; she knew that he would be just.

But on the instant she thought better of the impulse. Lay bare her life before Clifford Ashe ! How absurd. How could she endure his searching glance — a glance that would pierce the innermost recesses of her heart. How could she speak of Cranston White's shortcomings without confessing

her own? What would he think of a woman who had turned her back on her responsibilities? No; that avenue was closed. She turned from it with a sigh. The cross was *hers* — hers alone. She must bear it to the end.

She was not sorry to see Blue Bonnet coming up the path that cut through the woods from the sea. As she came up the veranda steps Alicia White choked back the sob that rose in her throat and forced her lips into a welcoming smile.

CHAPTER XII

BLUE BONNET POINTS THE WAY

BREAKFAST was being served at the Shravens cottage. The soft Oriental rug with its copper and blue hues that usually graced the broad library table had been removed, and a white cloth substituted. Flowers ornamented the center, and Mary Louise sat behind a sputtering coffee percolator. In her right hand she held a pancake turner with a golden brown cake baked to a delicious turn.

"Honey," she said to Blue Bonnet, who with Randall had accepted an invitation to breakfast as a sort of lark, "take this cake while you can get it. Felix has his eye on it."

"My eye was on you, if you please," Felix said, with a pleasant smile. "I was just regretting that my talent ran to landscapes. Now if I did figures, I would paint you in that bewitching, beribboned cap. You look so sweet and domestic."

Mary Louise blew him an airy kiss from the tips of her free hand.

"Thank you, darlin', for the compliment, but Blue Bonnet gets the cake just the same. Honey, rescue the maple sirup from Randall. I'm not sure there's a bit more in the house."

This playing at keeping house amused and interested Mary Louise. She was delighted when she discovered the electric plate which could so easily be operated on the living-room table. She adored the coffee percolator, the clean linen and fragile china which she found in the little closet off the tiny kitchenette. She could scarcely wait to serve Felix with his first meal, prepared by her own hands.

She knew very little about cooking. It wasn't an easy matter to stir up the pancakes, although she had watched old Jinnie make them at home a thousand times. Evidently her predecessor in the cottage had experienced the same difficulty, for there was a much thumbed cook book in plain sight of the little oil stove, with directions marked and recipes added — a beautiful one for fudge, and for several fruit salads.

Randall helped Blue Bonnet generously to the maple sirup and passed his cup for more coffee.

"It's fine," he remarked, nodding toward the percolator which had stopped fuming. "I wish Mother could see you cooking. She wouldn't get over the shock in a week."

Mary Louise shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh, I don't know — Mother always said I had plenty of ability — if I'd just exercise it. Blue Bonnet, wasn't it your adorable Robert Louis who said 'there's an unexplored island in each of us'? Maybe I'm a born cook. Who knows? Anyway,

I've always thought it a part of a woman's job to know how to do everything about a house. What would you think of a man who only half knew his business?"

"We had domestic science at Miss North's," Blue Bonnet said. "I learned how to make a lot of things — soup and mayonnaise dressing — and bread and cake," she added when every one laughed. "Truly, I did. I'll come over here and show you some day, if Mary Louise will let me. I've experimented on my own family and they are all alive and well."

There was a general exodus to the veranda. Blue Bonnet lingered behind with Mary Louise.

"I'm going to help you clear the things away and dry the dishes," she said.

"Indeed you're going to do nothing of the kind. You are going to run along with Randall and have a game of tennis. Felix will help me. He loves it. It makes him feel so married."

Blue Bonnet picked up her racquet and followed Randall out to the court. Her straight almost boyish form was a joyous thing to behold this morning. The early air had brought color to her cheeks, a sparkle to her eyes. She was in splendid form for playing, too, and gave Randall a hard tussle in the hour that followed, winning the game he fought for valiantly.

"Will you come with me over to those rocks?" he

said when they had paused to rest. He pointed to a small cliff that reached out into the ocean. "It's a fine place to get the view and find the sea life — starfish and that sort of thing."

Randall watched her as she swung along easily beside him. She was wearing a green costume that made her look like a wood nymph against the dark pines. Her sweater had broad green stripes alternating with white. The short green skirt was made of a soft material — velvet probably, and silver lights gleamed where the sun struck it.

There was nothing unusual about such a costume, except that it fitted into the morning, a part of the woodsy surroundings.

She had stopped to gather a great bunch of wild lilacs that grew along the way, carrying them comfortably in the bend of her arm.

"I'll relieve you of the flowers," Randall had said, but she shook her head.

"No, thank you. It isn't every day in November that I can pick flowers. I want to hold them."

November was almost gone. The days had been filled to the brim with happiness. And yet in the midst of her pleasures Blue Bonnet had paused, conscious that there was a lack somewhere. There was something — an indefinite, haunting something — that took away from the joy. Perhaps she missed John Churchill. There had been but one letter from him — a bread and butter letter, full of appreciation



“ HER GAZE WENT FARTHER OUT TO SEA ”

for the kindness that had been shown upon him. He ended with a few words regarding the Home and said that business consumed his time.

That was the reason he had not written more frequently, she fancied, unless — it was altogether probable that he spent his spare time with Fanny Howell. He said she was a wonderful pal. Blue Bonnet fell to thinking of them, picturing the long rides they had together along bridle paths and out into the country. Fanny was at home in the saddle.

“My, that’s a terrific sigh you’re heaving,” Randall said. They had reached the rocks and were very snug in the warm sunshine. “I hope I’m not responsible. Tired? That was a pull through the sand after the tennis.”

“No; not tired. Just thinking.”

“You’re always thinking lately. Something is on your mind. Can’t you confess to me?”

“There isn’t anything, Randall — really there isn’t.”

“Well, there is on mine, Blue Bonnet. Look round here, dear. I want to see your eyes.”

Her gaze went farther out to sea.

“Oh, Randall — *please* don’t! We’re so happy just now. Don’t spoil it. Look at those sea gulls daring the surf to cover them. Aren’t they cunning?”

“I don’t care a hang about sea gulls! I want *you* —”

“And the blueness of the water! Do you know I sometimes think that nature has her vanities. See how she’s put out all her best things this morning — almost as a princess would her jewels. See the sapphire and emeralds in the water; the amethysts in the mountains; the topaz in the hills. I really think she wants us to sit up and take notice.”

But Randall had caught the hand that lay nearest him on the rock and held it in a passionate grasp.

“Blue Bonnet,” he implored, “look at me, please. What do I care about the landscape? About anything in all the world but you — *just you!* I want you more than anything else in all the world — want you to be my wife. I’ve tried to tell you so many times, but you never would listen. Turn this way, *please* . . . let me see your face. Can’t you care for me, dear, just a little?”

“Not that way, Randall; no — I can’t. I’m sorry, but it’s impossible.”

She drew her hand away and slowly turned her eyes to those above her. The pain there hurt her to the heart.

“Oh, Randall — please — *please* don’t! — feel that way! It hurts me so — I can’t bear it. Why can’t we go on being the good friends we’ve always been? I love your friendship. It means so much to me.”

“Is there no way I can make you care, Blue Bonnet?”

"I'm afraid not, Randall."

"*Why* — will you tell me why?"

She was silent for a minute as if pondering.

"I'm afraid it would hurt you, Randall — if I told you the truth. I don't want to hurt you."

"Go ahead. . . . I want to know."

"And you'll take no offense?"

"Certainly not."

The sea pounded against the rocks; out on the billows the gulls rode, chattering of the adventure. Save for that and the water there was not a sound.

There was a sudden straight gaze from Blue Bonnet's eyes. Her expression had taken on a certain sweetness — a seriousness that communicated itself to Randall.

"I couldn't marry you, Randall — because . . . because you have no purpose in life — You're just drifting — idly. You aren't any more serious about the business of living — really *living*, than those gulls out there. They're just playing . . . swimming on the crest of the wave — as you are. I'm afraid I'll have to be very honest to make you understand. I couldn't love any man — who wanted to play all the time. I respect work too much. My people have all labored — and loved it. My father" — she hesitated as she always did when she mentioned that name, and lingered over it lovingly — "worked hard. He accomplished wonderful

things in his brief life — and my mother — *my mother* gave up a beautiful home and went to the Texas wilderness to help him. And when *I* marry, Randall, I want to be a helpmate . . . not an ornament or a plaything. I want to feel safe, too . . . feel that if my money should vanish suddenly, my husband could provide for me. I couldn't trust a man who wasn't ambitious."

It was a stunning blow. It had taken courage to deliver it.

Randall gave a hard little laugh.

"Then you think," he said, "that I'm a rotten loafer — a lazy cad!"

"I think you haven't found yourself, Randall. I think — I *know* that you could be splendid — if you wanted to be — it's in you."

He studied her with serious, darkening eyes.

"And if I did — *find myself* — could you care — then? Have you enough *faith* in me — could you trust me — to make good?"

"I could trust you — yes — if you set out with a definite purpose, but —"

"But you don't love me?"

"I'm afraid not, Randall — not that way."

"Is it because there is some one else?"

Blue Bonnet drew herself up perceptibly. She ignored the question.

"I beg your pardon. I have no right to ask — only. . . . Good heavens, you don't know what it

means to care, as *I* do — and then find there is some one else!”

A look, singularly like sympathy, swept Blue Bonnet's face for an instant, but she made no answer.

“You haven't told me,” he said, grasping at the last straw, “if you could grow to care — if I made good?”

“Wouldn't it be more to the point to make good — first? It would not be hard. You have your profession.”

“Hard!” He turned upon her almost angrily. “You don't know what you're talking about. There are hundreds of civil engineers to every square mile in the country. Look at the colleges turning them out to starve — in droves! There ought to be a law against it. Besides, if I stay out of the race, I'm giving my chance to some poor devil that needs it. Why should I slave my life away in some God forsaken hole; I don't have to.”

Blue Bonnet made no comment.

“It's a beastly profession — engineering. It takes you off into country that isn't fit for a dog to live in; deserts or mountain tops; insect ridden places —”

He paused suddenly, for Blue Bonnet had laughed: a clear lilting laugh that jarred on his nerves a bit.

“Oh, I beg your pardon. I wasn't laughing at you,” she apologized. “I just happened to think of

something. There was a girl at Miss North's last year who married an engineer and went to live somewhere with him — as you say, on the top of a mountain. They were way off from everything and everybody, and ”— the laugh floated out again — “ she had to manage in all sorts of ways, even to — *cut his hair*. Fancy!”

“ Lucky job she didn't cut him. I should have, I'm sure.”

He looked at Blue Bonnet with moody eyes that suddenly brightened.

“ And yet there are possibilities,” he admitted. “ I had a letter from a fellow only the other day who is opening up a railroad in Chile — he graduated in my class. He's coming along swimmingly — wrote me about a bit of construction that he wasn't quite up on. Construction was rather my specialty. He wanted me to come down and help him out — said there were great opportunities there — chance for a man to make a name.”

“ And you didn't *jump* at it!” Blue Bonnet's eyes were round with surprise.

“ No; there was an attraction here. You mean more to me than all the business opportunities in the world.”

Blue Bonnet rose, steadying herself on the rocks, refusing Randall's assistance. When her eyes reached a level with his he saw the scorn in them.

“ You're wasting time,” she said. “ No girl —

the right kind of a girl anyway — would marry a man who depended upon his father for support. Shall we go on? It must be time for lunch."

She was sorry — so very sorry — the next instant. Randall's eyes were stricken in their surprise. They held the look of a wondering child who suddenly finds a door closed in his face — not only closed, but locked and barred.

Blue Bonnet's heart was touched. She put out her hand and sought his eagerly.

"Randall, forgive me. I didn't mean to be unkind. Let us be friends. We have had such happy times together. Let us forget this horrid morning — and go on as before. *Please* — I shall always be your friend."

Randall reached for the flowers and put them safely in the bend of her arm. He didn't speak for a moment. When he did, there was a new note in his tone. Blue Bonnet scarcely knew what. He was the same courteous, solicitous Randall of old, with something added. Was it dignity — or smoldering anger?

The walk back was trying to both. It is not easy to make conversation under strain. Blue Bonnet was glad when they reached the hotel. She left Randall rather hurriedly and ran upstairs to her own room.

For a moment she stood at the window looking out, and a frown grew between her brows. What

had she done! How had she dared speak to Randall as she did. He had offered her the finest thing a man has to give — *his love*. He had asked her to be his wife and she had turned on him in anger. He had — but what was the use? — one could not retract words.

She put the flowers in water and then going across the hall knocked softly on Sarah's door.

"Tell Aunt Lucinda that I won't be down to lunch," she said, forcing a cheerful expression. "I had such a good breakfast with Mary Louise that I'm not hungry. I'm going for a walk. Don't let any one worry about me."

She was out of the hotel almost as quickly as she had entered it, swinging along a path that led through the hills past a wonderful old Mission. She struck through a pasture, walking under spreading windblown oak-trees until she reached the sea; then she dropped down on the warm sand and clasping her arms about her knees, sat lost in thought for over an hour.

She had known for months what was coming. Randall Patterson had made love to her almost from the day he had met her — made love in his foolish, flattering, Southern way, and she had laughed it off. But of late he had been so persistent. At the Exposition he had almost forced his attentions upon her, crowding out John and Knight. She had permitted it because of a promise she had made to his mother.

Long ago — it seemed long ago, though it was really less than a year — when Randall came to Boston, his mother had written her a letter: a sweet, motherly letter, asking her to be kind to her son. She spoke of his admiration for her, and what her fine, wholesome interest would mean to him.

She intimated, as delicately as a mother would, that Randall inclined to rather a gay life — he loved society, and that access to a home like her own would be a haven. She should never worry so long as she knew that her son visited it often.

Blue Bonnet recalled now how she had made haste to answer that letter. Mrs. Patterson had spared no effort to make her visit to the South pleasant, and it seemed a small return to pledge her own hospitality. She promised to see Randall often, and assured Mrs. Patterson that her latch string would always be out.

And then, too, she had really enjoyed Randall. There was something very delightful, very spontaneous, about the young man, who was always ready to share her pleasures.

He had kept in close touch with her even after he left Boston, with clever, interesting letters: letters that sounded a deeper note in his nature than one would have suspected. Blue Bonnet caught glimpses of fineness seldom apparent in his conversation. The friendship grew.

Mary Louise was another bond that linked them together.

One couldn't help loving charming, open-hearted Mary Louise. She was so genuine, so sweetly sympathetic: she had such cuddling, irresistible ways.

When Blue Bonnet thought of Mary Louise she sat up with a start. How was this going to affect their friendship? Suppose Randall told Mary Louise what she said; that she had accused him of being lazy. *Lazy!* The word had an odious sound. Why, it was the way they spoke of the negroes in the South! Mary Louise wouldn't stand for that one instant. Oh, how had she dared. . . . Why had she permitted herself? . . . Why should *she* have thought it necessary to point out Randall Patterson's duty to him? He had his father — his mother — his sister. She had intruded . . . blundered.

She got up and wandered back, away from the sea. The pounding of the waves irritated her, filled her ears. . . . She wanted to think clearly.

Yes; Mary Louise was going to be angry — furiously angry, and with just cause. She was going to feel that she — Blue Bonnet Ashe, was a meddler. One of those atrocious, critical persons who believe that from their viewpoint all the questions of the universe could be settled easily.

She took her time going back by a woodsy, round-about route. Her head ached and her eyes were hot with unshed tears. She wondered why she hadn't cried. She usually did when she was hurt — angry. Was that part of growing up — the relinquishment

of tears? Had she put away childish things altogether? She seemed to realize suddenly that she was a woman.

It was after five o'clock when she reached the hotel. The evening stage for Monterey was filled up before the veranda steps. She looked at the sign it bore absently: Carmel Bus, was all she saw. She didn't glance beyond — to the passengers.

But as she passed between the bus and the steps a man sprang out from the rear seat and touched her lightly on the shoulder. It was Randall — in traveling clothes. She glanced quickly at the seat he had vacated. His bags were piled up around it.

"I'm so glad you have come," he said, leading her a little to one side. "I wanted to say good-by. I'm off to-night — it's rather sudden — but —"

She interrupted him with a startled cry.

"Randall! Off where?"

"To Chile. You see — jobs like I spoke of don't last forever. Thank you for calling my attention to my — *opportunity*."

The bus driver was calling all aboard. She wanted to hold Randall — to ask him to wait, to think it over, but for the life of her she could not. Something — perhaps it was the new interest that shone from his flashing eyes, his sudden alertness — that prevented her.

She gave him her hand in a warm clasp. He took it in both his own, and, before she could even wish him Godspeed, he was gone.

CHAPTER XIII

RANDALL FINDS HIMSELF

It was a worn white little face that presented itself at Mary Louise's door early the next morning. Blue Bonnet had not slept. Her eyes were heavy and dull. She dreaded meeting Mary Louise. She almost wished she might find that she was out, and shrank back when the door opened.

Mary Louise had been crying. Her eyes were red and swollen. She kissed Blue Bonnet with all the old affection, and pulled her into the living-room, glad of her presence.

Felix sat before a brilliant fire on the hearth, reading a newspaper. He rose when Blue Bonnet entered, brought her a chair, and, with Blue Bonnet's permission, went back to his reading.

Mary Louise sank down on the couch and her eyes filled with tears. Slowly they rolled down on her soft blouse.

Blue Bonnet went over and threw her arms about her. The silent sympathy made Mary Louise weep the harder. She sobbed openly on Blue Bonnet's shoulder.

Felix put away his paper and laid a caressing hand on Mary Louise's dark hair.

"Please, Mary Louise," he said, "*don't!* You wouldn't if you knew how it hurt me. You will be ill. Randall's all right. He's just showing what bully stuff there is in him."

"Yes; you say that! That's a man's point of view. You don't know anything about what he's running into. *Fever* — and horrible *insects* — *heat like the inferno!* And to think he didn't even come and kiss me good-by. I never saw him after he went out of the house yesterday, laughing about my cooking — with his precious old kinky head shining in the sun. May be I'll never see him again — *never — never!* Oh, dear — oh, dear, I can't bear it, Felix, darlin'; I really can't."

Blue Bonnet drew away from Mary Louise, feeling that she had no right to her affection.

"And Mother will be *wild* — *simply wild!* Randall is the apple of her eye — you *know* it, Felix. She worships him. She just lives and breathes for him. She never wanted him to follow up his beastly old profession. She only sent him away to college because — because — gentlemen have to go. There was plenty for him to see to at home — Father's getting old. He doesn't need to make money — he doesn't have to work."

"Every one needs to work, sweetheart," Felix Shravens said, thoughtfully. "It's the law of the

world. Somebody worked to make the money Randall spends. Is it quite fair, do you think, for him to be idle — ”

“Felix, *stop, please!* Don’t vex me now. I couldn’t bear to quarrel with you. You know there are a lot of things we don’t agree about — but you said it would never matter: that it *never* would.” Mary Louise half sobbed the words.

Felix shook his head slowly and went back to his paper. Mary Louise fished about in her pocket for a letter which she finally found and put into Blue Bonnet’s hand.

“Read it,” she said. “A boy brought it over from the hotel about an hour ago. I wouldn’t have believed Randall could be so cruel.”

Blue Bonnet opened the note hesitatingly. She dreaded seeing the words.

“Sis, darling,” it read, “I have made up my mind very suddenly to take the position Cheever Smith offered me in Chile. I find that by going to-night I can make a boat leaving New York the 12th. It doesn’t give me any too much time. I am purposely avoiding saying good-by to you. I don’t want you to use any persuasions to keep me here. My duty came to me suddenly. I thank the Lord that I had enough of the right stuff in me to see it. You will be in my mind often, dear little Sis. We have lived too close for me ever to forget you. Write to me often when

you get my settled address and try to make Mother see that I am acting wisely, and for the best. My love to you and Felix. Ran."

Blue Bonnet folded the letter slowly and handed it back to Mary Louise. Mary Louise read it through again and put it in her pocket.

"I can't see," she moaned, "whatever made him do it. It was the farthest thing from his mind yesterday. He was planning to take us all for that seventeen mile drive to-day."

Blue Bonnet hesitated only a minute. She would have been honest at the point of the bayonet.

"I am to blame, Mary Louise," she said, and her voice did not falter. "We were talking — we went for a walk after we left here yesterday, over on the cliff there," she pointed through the open window. "We sat for a long time in the sunshine talking — of many things. I said, as Felix did a minute ago, that every man should work — have a definite purpose in life. That it was necessary — that is, if one wanted to count for anything with people —"

She had gone as far as she could. The rest was Randall's secret.

Mary Louise barely glanced up. Her gaze rested on the medallion in the living-room rug which she saw not.

"Honey," she said, "don't blame yourself. That might have *influenced* him, but it would not have

sent him. No — there was something else. *Something else,*” she repeated, as if unable to fathom the mystery.

It seemed a little strange that Mary Louise did not understand, but it had never occurred to her that Randall was seriously in love with Blue Bonnet. She knew that he admired her, but she was so accustomed to his spasmodic flirtations. She had hoped, oh, so often, that he might try to win her, and she knew that her mother shared the hope, but there had been nothing to justify their longings. The friendship was too open for courtship: there was too much camaraderie and too little aloofness.

But Felix Shravens understood. He looked up from his paper and his eyes searched Blue Bonnet’s face. To him, it was an open book. Randall had asked her to marry him and she had refused on the ground that he was an idler. It was like her. She was always keen and straight to the point. The thought must have pleased him, for when his eyes met hers they seemed to say: I understand — and I approve.

When Blue Bonnet left Mary Louise an hour later, she went straight to Mrs. White.

She found her in her room finishing a bit of mending. She sat by the window and her needle gleamed in the sunshine as she plied it diligently. She greeted Blue Bonnet with a smile.

"May I come in?" Blue Bonnet asked, helping herself to the one rocking-chair the room boasted.

"Are you very busy?"

"On the contrary I am trying to find something to do."

"Are you about ready to go on to the ranch, Mrs. White? Aunt Lucinda and Sarah seem to be. I don't think I can exist very much longer without Uncle Cliff. I — there's something I would love to talk with him about — now. Something that's worrying me."

"What is it, Blue Bonnet? Could you tell me?"

Blue Bonnet scarcely hesitated.

"It's about Randall Patterson. You must have thought it very queer — his going off like that last night — so suddenly."

"No; not particularly. He said that he had word from a friend of a splendid opening in Chile. I suppose he had a cable."

"No — he didn't. He got very angry at me yesterday morning — or — I thought he was angry; maybe he wasn't. I couldn't quite understand what his attitude was. He seemed changed — all in an instant."

Mrs. White smiled understandingly, but she said nothing.

"You see" — it seemed almost unfair to Randall, but she had to go on now that she had started — "you see, he thought — he fancied that he was in

love with me, and he wanted me to marry him, and I thought — ”

She stopped, embarrassed and confused.

“ Yes — and you thought — ”

“ That he was rather presumptuous — that is, I didn’t think he had a right to ask any girl to marry him when he wasn’t making a living — *for himself!* When his father supports *him*; and I told him so. I told him he ought to go to work — or something like that. I can’t remember just what I did say, now. It all happened so quickly. Do you think it was very, very wrong? ”

“ I think it was very, very right.”

Blue Bonnet’s eyes opened in surprise.

“ But perhaps you wouldn’t if you could see how Mary Louise feels. She’s almost ill over his going. She says he’s running into all kinds of dangers down there in Chili, or wherever it is. She says — ”

Mrs. White laughed a low, musical laugh.

“ Fiddlesticks! My dear, very few people seek out danger. I once knew a man who had ample means, but he wouldn’t travel for fear of accident, and one day while he was walking down the main street of his own home town a sign fell from a building and killed him.”

“ Yes — that sometimes happens, but Randall’s mother is going to be frantic over his leaving. She doesn’t want him to follow his profession. She

thinks it isn't necessary, because they have plenty of money."

"Don't worry. You have probably done Randall a great service. I shouldn't wonder but that he will tell you so, some day. Don't give the matter another thought — except to hope for his success."

Blue Bonnet felt encouraged, but still she worried. Mary Louise's distressed eyes rose before her again and again. Randall's mother was grieving, too — she had received a message, no doubt, acquainting her with her son's new plans. Blue Bonnet could picture her emotion, her fear and alarm.

She put on her hat after awhile and went over to the post office for the mail.

"Anything for Miss Ashe?" she inquired.

"Miss Blue Bonnet Ashe?"

"Nothing this morning."

"Is the Eastern mail in — from Boston?"

"No; not until two o'clock this afternoon."

She was rewarded the second time she inquired at the little square window. There were several letters: one from Kitty, one from Carita and one from Fanny Howell. She opened the one from Fanny hastily. She had written at some length, a glowing description of the Home, and then:

"What did you do to John Churchill when he was in California? He came back looking thin and haggard. We've had him out to the house as much as

possible, but he seems submerged in business. I think he's working too hard, but, of course, it's utterly useless to argue with a man about his business—you never get anywhere. However, we have had one or two good walks. It's pretty cold for riding. Don't use yourself up. I fancy doing the Exposition must be very wearing." Etc., etc.

Blue Bonnet read the letters from Carita and Kitty, but it was difficult to keep her mind on the doings of Woodford's new minister. Even his serious intentions toward Kitty failed to interest her. She found herself going back to Fanny Howell's letter. She wondered why John Churchill was looking ill; why he was working so hard; why he had left San Francisco so hurriedly, until it seemed to resolve into one huge question mark.

She turned her steps up the street toward the big livery stable that advertised "saddle horses at reasonable rates," and a half hour later one might have seen her in company with Sarah, galloping down the broad highway that led to the valley.

CHAPTER XIV

THE RANCH AGAIN

Day!

Faster and more fast,

O'er night's brim, day boils at last:

Boils pure gold, o'er the cloud cup's brim.

. . . Till the whole sunrise,

Not to be surpassed, rose, reddened,

And its seething breast flickered in bounds,

Grew gold, then overflowed the world.

BLUE BONNET was watching the sun rise on the Texas prairie, and the lines from "Pippa Passes," which Miss North had once taken pains to bury deep in the recesses of her mind, came to her.

There was something wonderful and mystical in the birth of a new day — especially on the plains. One seemed to be present at the creation.

It was an old habit, this rising at an early hour and riding with Uncle Cliff out to a rise of ground where the view was unexcelled.

"It's as marvelous as ever, isn't it Uncle Cliff?"

"It's great, Honey!"

"And there's no place in all the world where you get such a view, is there?"

"No place; not even in Boston."

She smiled, a fleeting, triumphant smile.

"I've got past all those old comparisons, Uncle Cliff. I feel as if I had a share in the universe now. And yet — after all, Texas has the first place in my heart. Somehow, when we come back, and swing into the old road down there, and the old ranch house looms in sight, I feel as if I had come into my own — as if it all belonged to me."

"It nearly all does, Honey," Uncle Cliff suggested with a smile.

"Oh, but I don't mean *that*! I'd feel the same if I didn't own an inch of it. It's just that it's *home*, I reckon. It's a part of me. Look, Uncle Cliff, he's coming now in all his glory. See the path he's making!"

And simultaneously with old Sol's appearance, Uncle Cliff's hat came off, and Blue Bonnet snatched at her old sombrero, holding it high above her.

The time had passed very quickly since coming to the ranch. Christmas was over — a very quiet Christmas, and a bit lonely. Blue Bonnet had known that it would be, for Grandmother was gone, and Gabriel and Carita far away in Boston.

Blue Bonnet sorely missed Grandmother's cheerful greeting on Christmas morning, but she tried to be happy and cheerful for Aunt Lucinda's sake. They had had their presents at the breakfast table — an old custom at the ranch; very simple presents this year, because they were so far away from shopping districts. John Churchill had remembered them

with the usual boxes of candy and late books. Carita and Gabriel had sent a charming box filled with dainty gifts, and Nora had tucked in a Christmas fruit cake and a plum pudding.

A cunning little letter had arrived from Gabriel a week before Christmas. It was as frank and honest as Gabriel's own soul. "Don't you worry about me and Carita" (his English still distressed Blue Bonnet) he begged, "'cause we're going to have a fine time. Mr. Churchill is going to take us to a big hotel for dinner, and then to a movie or something. Mr. Churchill is awful nice, and I think he likes me a lot, 'cause sometimes he hugs me up hard when there isn't anybody looking, and one time he told me that when I smiled I looked like somebody he use to love *very, very* much. When I asked him who, he only smiled and said, 'a little girl, long ago,' but it made him awful sad. He asked me if I wouldn't like to call him Uncle John, and I said yes. You don't care, do you, Blue Bonnet?

"I've been awful good and practiced hard. Fräulein is saving up a lot of things to tell you about me, but I don't care. I've been about as good as I knew how, and, anyway, Uncle Cliff always says that *very* good boys is apt to be *sissies*. I'd rather be terrible bad than be a sissy. Give my love to Uncle Joe and all the cowboys that know me. This X is a kiss, only don't tell anybody."

Carita had sent a long, chatty letter, and so had

John. John's letter was friendly and interesting. There was a complete report of the Home, which was almost ready for occupancy—but the letter lacked something; Blue Bonnet scarcely knew what. She read it over many times in an endeavor to find out, but in vain.

Changes had taken place at the ranch. A year invariably brings changes. Mr. and Mrs. Judson had gone with the coming of Knight as superintendent; Mr. Judson accepting a call to a parish in a small Texas town.

One thing had brought sorrow to Blue Bonnet's heart. Old Francesco was gone. She had passed away peacefully in the late summer, leaving a kindly message for Niña, which touched Blue Bonnet deeply. She could not bear to ride by the little cottage and see the neglected garden, for the house had been locked and abandoned.

But there were joys as well as sorrows. Uncle Joe had taken to Knight as the proverbial duck to water; and Knight had taken up the management of the ranch with tact and ability.

"We've got the right man, I'm sure," Uncle Cliff said to Blue Bonnet as he watched him going over the place. "He's thorough and reliable. Best of all, Joe likes him. He wouldn't have tolerated an older man, but he thinks he can teach Knight, and so he can—from the ground up. It's a wonderful opportunity for the lad."

Blue Bonnet had seen but little of Knight. He was very busy; his work often took him to the surrounding country, so that he came home weary and ready to rest. Sometimes she caught a glimpse of him stalking over the fields, his blue flannel shirt bared to the breeze, sombrero pulled well over his eyes, his spurs clanking as he walked.

"What a magnificent looking fellow he is," Blue Bonnet would remark to Uncle Cliff, and Uncle Cliff would reply:

"Sound as a nut,—and capable. Honey, *capable!*"

Blue Bonnet and Sarah had long gallops over the country on horseback, while Aunt Lucinda and Mrs. White sewed by the fire in the living-room, or rode in the buckboard, seeing the ranch under Uncle Joe's personal supervision.

Alicia White had one memorable ride. Mr. Ashe was driving to the nearest village twenty miles away one morning, and as Blue Bonnet was busy, asked her to keep him company. She was very charming as she climbed into the light buckboard beside him. She wore a long silk coat over her warmer wrap, and a soft, misty blue veil covered her hat and draped itself becomingly beneath her chin.

That ride brought her closer to Clifford Ashe than she had dreamed possible. It was a wonderful day, to begin with, serene and blue. Clifford Ashe was

in a retrospective mood, and he told her much about Blue Bonnet ranch — his earliest recollections of it. He had grown up with the country, as had his father and grandfather before him. His love for Texas was an inheritance.

“I like to get away, sometimes,” he said, “but I always come back. I suppose I’ll end my days here. Every stick and stone on the place is a friend. This old road —” he pointed with his whip to where it ran straight as a ribbon ahead — “brings a host of memories. I drove over it to my first circus, later to school, and followed it to the last resting-place of my father and mother — my brother and his wife. Did you ever think how much a part of you a familiar road becomes?”

Mrs. White had no such memories, and said so frankly. Her life had been a battlefield — mostly. There were few happy days to look back upon — few memories to keep alive.

She was not complaining. Mr. Ashe rather admired the plucky, if somewhat wistful smile that followed the announcement. He turned and looked into her eyes for a moment, scarcely realizing that he held them with his glance; they were so appealing, so frank.

It hurt him to think that a woman should have been denied the happiness of a home. It was hers by right.

To Alicia White that glance invited confidence.

He had told her so much of his past life — it would ease the burden to talk of her own.

“ You see,” she began, and turned her eyes away out over the sun-warmed fields, “ I was so young when my parents died, and I needed a mother — a girl needs her mother more at eighteen, almost, than at any other time; when she begins to think about love — and marriage. She knows so little about life — about the cruel pitfalls out in the world. She looks upon love as a panacea for all ills . . . a haven . . . shelter from tyrannous home rule — or — ”

Before she knew it she had poured out her story, sparing neither Cranston White nor herself. She told it impartially, straight-forwardly, and Mr. Ashe listened in silent sympathy. Alicia White knew that he sympathized. She felt it, even had she not witnessed his swiftly changing expressions.

He asked but one question when she had finished.

“ Is he — this man — still living? ”

“ Yes; he is in France — fighting.” She told him how he had offered his services, and why.

“ And I think — I fancy he wants to come back. I had a letter from him while I was in Carmel. He didn’t say, positively, but I understood — I *knew*. I’ve been waiting ever since to speak with you about it. It seems only right that you should know something about me. You have taken me in your home. You have been so very kind.”

"And you want to go back to him — if he comes home?" he inquired.

"I don't know. I've thought about it day and night ever since I got the letter. I don't *want* to go back, oh, no; but I must do what is right. My conscience would make life unbearable if I didn't."

"Do you care for him?"

"I don't love him — no. That would be impossible after all that I have suffered. I doubt if I ever loved him, really. It was a girl's mad infatuation at first . . . he offered me a way out of Valeria Lenox's cruelties. And then — he was the father of my child. That is a bond — even though she is dead."

"Yes — that is a bond." Clifford Ashe spoke below his breath.

"Do you think I should go back? I wish you would tell me what to do. I am so alone. I have no one to advise me. I think I shall go mad trying to reason it all out — trying to decide."

He did not speak for a moment, and, when he did, it was in an impersonal way.

"It would be a poor sort of world, wouldn't it, if a man didn't have an opportunity to rectify his mistakes; if he couldn't have a second chance? Most of us are failures — somewhere along the line. But our shortcomings are not of the kind that show to our disadvantage, and we are easily forgiven. I suspect if we lived up to the best that is in us we

would all reach out more, lend a hand oftener. We are inclined to barter too much in this thing called love. We say, I give this, and that, and I demand such and such a thing in return. If we gave unstintingly of our best to satisfy the need of the other, we should raise the commonplace to the ideal — should really triumph. From this viewpoint I should say that it was your duty to return to your husband."

He said it as if it hurt, and turned his eyes away from the glance that sought his so earnestly.

"But why should I give so much to Cranston White — when he gives so little?"

"Because of his need: because you entered into a contract. You promised to do your best to make his life happy. Because *he* failed —"

"I have no right to fail also! You think I should sacrifice myself for him? That I should give up all that makes me happy?"

"I think that is a question you must decide for yourself. We can't carry each other's burdens and solve each other's problems in this world, much as we should like to. The human soul is a lonely thing. We enter this world alone — we go out of it alone, we endure our sorrows alone. No one can help us in our direst need."

How true it was!

"But sometimes it is given us to point a way. Out of experience comes knowledge. Isn't that true? And to be pleased with ourselves — truly

pleased, to know that we have responded to the best within, is our nearest approach to happiness. You believe that, I'm sure?"

Alicia White did not speak for some minutes. When she did, all the bitterness had gone from her tone.

"Thank you," she said, and the tears in her eyes told of gratitude too deep for words.

That night a long letter started on its journey to France. A letter that gave hope and cheer to a lonely man in the trenches: a man who had counted the days and the hours until the message should reach him, shedding tears of joy when it was finally put in his hands.

CHAPTER XV

AN UNEXPECTED GIFT

JANUARY was misting into February before Blue Bonnet was ready to return to Boston. The ranch had proved not only alluring, but beneficial. Aunt Lucinda's step was lighter than it had been for a year, her eyes brighter. She had lost the troubled expression that had come with the passing of Grandmother, and her smile was less fleeting.

Mrs. White and Sarah had enjoyed the change, and Blue Bonnet loved the carefree existence as never before.

"It's so glorious," she said one day to Uncle Cliff, "to get away from the city and be yourself. Nobody to live up to; nobody to frown if you break a few mossbacked conventions; nobody to say, 'you can, of course, but I believe I wouldn't.' And oh, the joy of a middy blouse and a divided skirt!"

There were other things to rejoice in, too: sunrises and sunsets; long gallops over the country. There was time to read; to take naps in the long afternoons and write letters; there were the little brown babies — seven or eight on the place — to

romp with; above all, there was peace and contentment.

Benita rejoiced to have Blue Bonnet at home again. She followed her about with tender, adoring eyes, and Blue Bonnet seemed never to tire of her stories: stories of her early life on the ranch, of the coming of Blue Bonnet's mother, the gracious young señorita whom every one loved, and the handsome señor, her husband, who worshiped the ground she trod upon.

And one day Benita had brought forth a charming rosewood box that gave forth a sweet odor of orris root when it was opened. She put it in Blue Bonnet's hand timidly, holding to it as if something might happen if it left her grasp.

"Oh, Benita, what a love of a box! Where ever did it come from and where has it been hidden all these years?"

There were tears in old Benita's eyes as she answered:

"It is for my Niña, now that she is a woman. Your mother put it into my hands once in the long ago and told me to keep it for her baby. I think there are letters — though I know not. The box is of your father's making. He fashioned it for the young señorita, your mother, before she came here to live."

"But where have you kept it all these years, Benita? I have never seen it before."

“No; Niña was not to see it until she was grown,” Benita answered. “It has been safe — safe in Benita’s keeping.”

Blue Bonnet carried the box to her room. Benita was right, there were letters — many of them; some addressed in a clear masculine hand, some in a pretty, round girlish hand and tied in a packet with a slender ribbon. On the very top lay an envelope, faintly yellow, marked with her own name.

Blue Bonnet took it up wonderingly. She looked at the beginning and then at the signature. For a moment tears blinded her sight. It had been written over sixteen years before and it began:

“MY PRECIOUS ONE:

“This morning when I picked you up all fresh and rosy from your bath and held you for a moment close against my heart, the thought came to me — I suppose it has come to thousands of doting mothers the world over — that I might not live to see you grown. All the morning I tried to throw the foolish fancy off, but it clung to me persistently, and, at last — simply to satisfy a mood that would not be put aside — I brought my portfolio down here in the fields where there is no one to laugh at me but the saucy blue bonnets that are crowding the landscape simply because it is March and they have an idea that they own the earth. Adorable things, how I love them!

“ I left you asleep, my sweet, so soft and dimpled in your little bed, with Benita’s watchful eye upon you. Were you to sneeze she would hear you — even at the length of the farthest corral: good kind Benita. Can we ever repay her for all her thought of us?

“ Perhaps you and I will some day laugh together over this funny little note — when I am a silly, doting old grandmother, mayhap, and you have your first-born on your knee, holding it close, fearful that the gods, jealous of so great happiness, might snatch it from you. Only then could you understand.

“ There is but one thing in all the world, my little one, that would be harder than giving you up, and that is — ah, I can scarcely write it, for the thought makes me cold — to part with your father. How you will love me some day for giving you your father! You approve my good judgment now, for though you are only two, and such a wee thing at that, you have learned to listen for his footsteps; to reach for him with frantic delight before he has turned the garden path that leads to your corner on the old veranda.

“ *Your father!* The day would not be long enough for me to tell you of his gentleness, his wondrous kindness. He is my heart’s idol, my blessed one. I sometimes wonder when I look at you asleep in the bend of his arm — I have known

him to hold you for hours at night when he was weary — very weary, lest the slightest movement might break your sweet rest — if you have inherited the best that is in him. If you will be tender and loving and generous. If you will remember the poor and unfortunate, give of yourself, of your strength and abundance, if God so favors you — as he gives.

“How I wish that you might know him as he is now, so splendid in the strength of his young manhood, so good to look upon. It grieves me when the old ladies from the ranchos round about take you on their knees and say that you resemble me. I wanted you like him — but, after all, looks amount to little; it is the soul of him I would wish for you. Please God it is His gift to you.

“It has just occurred to me as I write, that there is one way you might know him: his ideals, his ambitions, his great love for me — through his letters. When I go back to the house I shall give the rosewood box which he made to hold them into Benita’s hands to treasure for you. And I shall lay this little letter a-top the pile where your eyes will light upon it before you go farther. Somehow — I wish I did not feel so sure that I would not be with you when you break the seal — and yet — when I look back over the past three years of perfect happiness — I realize

I have had so much more than other women, that I am satisfied — quite satisfied.

“It is so still down here by the big rock in the south field; so still that I can hear the rustle of the grass and the whisperings of the blue bonnets as they sway in the sunshine. I wonder if you are going to love the old ranch as I love it. Last night you were restless and we brought you down here to feel the moon’s soothing touch on the great blue fields. You stretched your arms out to the nodding flowers and gathered them into your tiny frock to your heart’s content, and we christened you Blue Bonnet — *you* — the fairest flower among them.

“I love this spot. We come here every afternoon in pleasant weather — you and I. I with my embroidery or your tiny garments, which I am learning to fashion quite skillfully — you with your toys. We can see the faint blue smoke as it curls up from the men’s quarters, hear their cheery laughter, and the occasional clang of a banjo or the squeak of a violin. Sometimes we climb up on the rock to wave adieu to your father and your Uncle Cliff — *your adoring Uncle Cliff* — as they ride off on a tour of inspection. We see the flutter of their white handkerchiefs for miles down the old road, and your kisses wafted from your rosy little palms fly to them on wings of love.

" Sometimes we come in the early evening, and Benita brings us a royal supper packed so neatly in a basket ; delectable cold chicken (of which you are permitted to have the skeleton leg, poor baby) and sundry other dainties. We watch the sun set, the purple shadows gather and fade into gray while your father cuddles you in his arms and I hum a lullaby.

" I must go back to you now — you will be waking and calling for your mother. I shall forget this disquieting mood when I have you in my arms again and laugh at foolish presentiments.

" With the love of my heart, my precious,
" YOUR MOTHER."

The deadly silence of the room was suddenly broken by dry hard sobs, for Blue Bonnet, still holding the rosewood box in her lap, had put her head down on its satiny surface and was giving way to the most poignant grief she had perhaps ever known in her life. Out of the past her mother's voice had spoken. The letter had made her presence so real that she could almost have reached out and touched her — and yet, it was the shadow, the phantom, the *unreality* that tore her heart.

For almost an hour she sat, weeping spasmodically ; but the storm gradually spent itself and she turned to the other letters. It took a long time to go through them, but she read each one, stopping

sometimes to dream, or read over passages that held her.

She felt a little dazed the rest of the day, and, to avoid the questioning glances of the family, watched her opportunity to get out to the stable unobserved. She ordered her own horse saddled immediately, and a few moments later galloped off down the long road that led to quiet fields with lowing herds of cattle and gentle babbling streams that promised rest to her tired heart.

“Uncle Cliff,” she said that night when they were alone, “Benita gave me a box of letters my mother left for me, to-day. I spent several hours going over them. I think I know what you mean when you say ‘*straight and true like an Ashe*,’ now, and oh, Uncle Cliff, how it must have hurt you when I said I hated the ranch—you remember, when I wanted to go back East to Grandmother. I am so sorry—but I shall never feel that way again—*never!* I shall always love it—*for her sake.*”

She scarcely waited to hear his answer. The tears were too near the surface, but she felt his silent caress on her shoulder, and knew that he had forgiven her.

CHAPTER XVI

A WEEK END

BLUE BONNET'S return to Boston was marked by two events: the opening of the Elizabeth Clyde Home and her début into society. The opening of the Home took precedent, a little to Mrs. Howell's disappointment.

Blue Bonnet was delighted at the progress that had been made at the Home since her departure for California, and, thanks to John Churchill and Fanny Howell, there was little left to be desired in its construction.

The property was located in the tenement district, not far from the spot where Blue Bonnet had found the Fiore children the year before. Mr. Ashe had been fortunate enough to secure a building that — so far as the outer walls went — was in good condition. It was only necessary to tear out the interior and build soundly and securely.

Blue Bonnet paused before the comfortable, homelike building the day after her arrival in Boston, scarcely crediting her eyes. It was almost imposing in its simple elegance. The front door had an inviting look, and when one stepped into the

airy kindergarten room one realized further possibilities.

The dining-room was sunny and cheerful, and upstairs the day nursery, with its dozens of little beds along the walls, held Blue Bonnet entranced.

"Uncle Cliff!" she cried, "isn't it wonderful — wonderful! And to think it is mine — mine and the kiddies! I can scarcely wait to furnish it. Can't you see how those windows in the dining-room are going to look with the white curtains and the blue Japanese side hangings I brought from Chinatown; and the little low white tables and the white benches drawn up close, and the pots of red geraniums in the window sills, and —"

"But the children, Honey, where are they all coming from?"

"That's easy. There will be children enough. The only trouble will be in caring for all that want to come. I shall have some notices printed and tacked up on the building immediately."

"Notices?"

"Yes; saying that a free kindergarten will be opened in this house in ten days and that reservations should be made early."

"Is that the way you begin — with a kindergarten?"

"That's the nucleus around which you build. Through the children you come to know the parents."

"And you think you can be ready in ten days? I'm afraid it is impossible. You have to furnish the building, find a matron, a trained nurse and servants. Go a little slow, Honey — a little slow."

"Mrs. White and Fräulein will help me. Mrs. White is almost as interested as I am. She's going to come down and register the children for the kindergarten, and Fräulein will help me get the servants. It isn't going to be so hard as you think, Uncle Cliff, really it isn't."

"I don't want you to make yourself sick, Blue Bonnet. And these children! I insist that a nurse looks each one over carefully before it is admitted."

"Yes, Uncle Cliff; I'll see to that."

The next two weeks were the busiest ones of Blue Bonnet's life. It was nearer three weeks than ten days when the Home really opened. Blue Bonnet was amazed at the length of time it took to find competent people to operate such an establishment. Fräulein was inclined to be fussy about the help, and Blue Bonnet would have been impatient if Mrs. White had not held her in check, rather siding with Fräulein.

"Rome wasn't built in a day, Blue Bonnet," she would say when Blue Bonnet's anxiety got the better of her.

There were long periods of shopping when Blue Bonnet and Mrs. White came home weary and

exhausted; but the delight of seeing things eventually placed in the Home more than compensated.

The furnishings were simple, but good. The small reception-room, on the main floor, which was to be used for callers, and by the matron and nurses, boasted no mahogany. There were deep, prettily upholstered wicker chairs, a comfortable couch with large lazy cushions, a writing desk of the mission type; a domestic rug in soft brown hues to match the walls, and the rather high windows held green, growing plants in attractive receptacles.

The kindergarten room was bare of furniture, except for the small chairs and tables, but it was sunny and bright, and Blue Bonnet longed to see each little chair filled and hear the busy hum of voices.

"Almost ready to open your house now, I hear," Uncle Cliff said one night when she came home tired and a bit blue. Blue Bonnet was just beginning to realize how responsibilities pile up.

"Yes, next Thursday, Uncle Cliff. I thought this afternoon, when I crossed Beacon Street, how glad I was — there was such an icy blast blowing. It almost cut one's flesh. I long to see the children huddled about the fireplace in the kindergarten room. Do you suppose they've ever seen an open fire blazing?"

"Not many of them, Honey."

"I shall keep one going all the time. Fanny

thinks it very extravagant with the furnace, but I want it for cheer, not for warmth."

"I'm afraid, Blue Bonnet, that this enterprise is going to be quite expensive — going to cost a large sum of money. We must be business-like, you know."

"Yes; I try to be; but, after all, Uncle Cliff, there is no other way I wish to spend money."

She came into the den the next morning looking a little weary.

"I believe I'll run down to Woodford for the week end," she said to Uncle Cliff. "I need the rest, and I haven't seen Kitty since her mother died."

"That's a fine idea, Honey."

There was another reason why she wanted to get away, but she did not mention it. She wanted to be alone, out of the noise and confusion that she had built up around her — she wanted to think.

Delia, as usual, had her room ready for her, and when she had greeted Aunt Lucinda and Sarah, she climbed the old stairs to the haven that awaited her with eager steps.

"I'm just a little bit worn out," she said to Sarah, who had followed and stood on the threshold of the door ready to be invited in for a visit. "If you don't mind, I think I'll take a little nap before dinner."

She threw off her wraps, hung her traveling clothes in the closet, and, warm and comfortable in a

kimono which she had tucked in her suit-case, lay down on the couch to rest.

It was a place to dream, rather than sleep, for Delia had lighted the fire on the hearth and soft shadowy lights flickered about the room, deepening the roses in the pink chintz curtains that hung at the windows, gleaming on the footboard of the old mahogany bed.

Outside, flakes of snow brushed the window panes lightly. Blue Bonnet's thoughts flew back to her home-coming, nearly a month before. It was good to be in her house again, but she had been too busy to enjoy its comforts. Furnishing the Home had taken such an endless amount of time.

What a help John Churchill had been! He had called for her the day after her return from the ranch; had taken her over the building, showing her with as much pride and pleasure as if it had been his own, the improvements, the advantages the place offered. So much had been accomplished in her absence. She had left instructions and he and Mr. Feganza had carried them out to the minutest detail.

They had gone the rounds of the room as gleefully as two children, he with interest, she with open delight, and yet — why was it: underneath the happiness there was an impenetrable something she could not fathom. She felt that he was gay under a strain; friendly, with diffidence. She knew that a

gulf was widening between them, and, try as she would, she could not bridge it over.

What was the matter? What had she done? He often came to the house, but seldom remained for dinner. Several times when her uncle wished to speak with him in the evening he had caught him at the office. He was working very hard.

She wondered why she cared so much — and knew without wondering. In the old days — way back, when she was a child and beginning to have day dreams down by the old rock in the south pasture — a vision had come to her of a Prince Charming. He had not arrived on a foaming steed, neither had he any of the requisites of fairy book lore: indeed she had never seen his face clearly. But he was her knight, nevertheless — *her knight*. He was good to look upon without being handsome; when he entered a room he attracted attention — not by any trick of manner; not through charm — that was too elusive and subtle a thing to reckon with; even as a child she had realized that. Neither was it *savoir faire*, such as Randall Patterson boasted. It was a much more worthy thing: it was character. It was kindness and courtesy and understanding — it was mentality and good comradeship — a thousand things that go to make up the sum total of fineness.

And John Churchill so nearly filled this ideal. Slowly the knowledge had dawned upon her. She had liked him from the beginning, that day when she

had followed him about his home, watching him as he blew the dust from books and removed covers from furniture. Something had attracted her — it wasn't so much his manner — as his bearing. One trusted him instinctively. She had loved the way he had left her alone with Uncle Cliff before the door of his sister's room. She had caught the sorrow in his eyes when she joined him on the landing above. She knew that underlying his friendly glance there was depth of feeling.

She loved his way with Gabriel, too. His protecting arm about the boy's shoulder, his interest in his music, his lessons. She loved to watch him — as she often had in the summer and autumn — start off with Gabriel for a day in the country or the woods roundabout. She marveled at his patience with the child's long stories of his play, his companions, the hundred and one things that are of interest to a child but so monotonous and boresome to their elders.

And then — he was so necessary to her happiness. The days were long when she did not see him — the evenings interminable. What did it all mean? Was this *love* — love for a man, or for an ideal?

She must have fallen asleep with her thoughts, for John was still in her mind when a knock at the door interrupted her slumber. Sarah thrust her head in.

“Amanda's downstairs, Blue Bonnet, may she

come up? You've been asleep quite a while or I wouldn't have disturbed you."

"Yes; of course. I want to see her."

Amanda ran upstairs lightly, and the next moment the girls were locked in each other's arms.

"Oh, Blue Bonnet, I'm *so* glad to see you back! Did you have a wonderful time? And how is your Uncle Cliff and Gabriel and everybody?"

"Very well, thank you, Amanda — and you?"

"Couldn't be finer, Blue Bonnet."

"And Mr. Everett? I suppose he is well, and you had a beautiful Christmas?"

"Lovely! Alec was here, too, you know. My dear, you should see Alec. He's splendid; so tall and soldierly and dear. We were so proud of him we hardly knew what to do. Kitty trotted him all over the country to show him off."

"And Kitty — how is she?"

A shadow crossed Amanda's face.

"Blue Bonnet, haven't you heard? Don't you know?"

"Know what?"

"Hasn't your aunt told you that — that —"

"I've hardly seen Aunt Lucinda, Amanda. I was so tired when I arrived that I came right up here to lie down. What has happened to Kitty?"

"It's her father, Blue Bonnet — dear old Dr. Clark. He's gone — they — Kitty and old Margaret — found him day before yesterday morning

dead — in his bed. He had gone to sleep — and he didn't waken, that's all. It was a beautiful way to go, but it is terrible for poor Kitty. She's frantic with grief."

Blue Bonnet sank back on the couch and looked at Amanda with horror-stricken eyes. Kitty, too, was an orphan. Who could know better than she what that meant?

"It was a terrible shock to Kitty," Amanda went on. "He hadn't complained any to speak of, but he seemed very tired all the time — ever since Mrs. Clark went. It was as if the mainspring were broken. Something had given way within him — I think it was his heart. He idolized his wife."

"And when did this happen?"

"Day before yesterday. The funeral was this morning."

"And where is Kitty?"

"Jack Ferren took her home with him as soon as the funeral was over. She'll be with her aunt for awhile."

They fell to talking of the old days, presently: days when the We Are Sevens were happy and care-free. There was no use denying it, young womanhood brought responsibilities.

"I'm going to tell you something," Amanda said when they were about to part. Sarah had gone downstairs to read to Miss Clyde. "I don't believe Kitty would mind. Of course, it's a secret, but she

will want you to know. Kitty's engaged to Alec. Of course they can't be married until he finishes his education and has a commission, but they will then. He asked her when he was home for the holidays, and Dr. Clark seemed so pleased over it. He's known Alec ever since he was a little boy, and he said he felt so safe in giving Kitty to him."

Blue Bonnet's eyes lighted.

"Amanda, how splendid! I always knew that Alec liked Kitty — and that Kitty liked him. Remember that time I got so angry with Alec because he struck Chula with his whip? It was horrid of me: he was perfectly justified. But Kitty took it up with a vengeance. She was furious with me, and gave me a regular lecture. I knew then it was because I had hurt Alec. Straws show which way the wind blows. Well, I'm glad — *so glad* to know it's going to be a match. By the way, how about the new minister? I thought he was attentive to Kitty."

Amanda laughed below her breath.

"The new minister has been called to greener fields, Blue Bonnet. He was too young and too broad in his views for Woodford. We have a very staid, sanctimonious, middle-aged man now; a widower with several children. He's so terribly good that half the young folks won't go to church, but the elder people are delighted."

Blue Bonnet sighed.

"Woodford is a little slow," she said, "but she's

sound ; she hasn't been caught in the whirlpool that's carrying most of us along these days. If you want to live fast, Amanda, get a settlement house on your hands. That will keep you busy."

"But you love the work?"

"I adore it — or will when we get started. There are so many preliminaries."

"How's Mr. Churchill, Blue Bonnet?"

"He's very well."

Amanda hesitated as if expecting something more.

"I suppose you see a lot of him?"

"Not a great deal. He's been dear about helping me with the Home — getting settled, you know."

Amanda seemed disappointed.

"I had hoped that — that you might care for him a lot, Blue Bonnet. He's one of the nicest men I ever met. I suppose it is because I'm so happy myself that I want to see all my friends happy."

"I am happy, Amanda."

"Yes, of course; but I mean — oh, there's only one sort of happiness that really counts, Blue Bonnet, and that's — happiness — with somebody you care for."

She was blushing so prettily that Blue Bonnet leaned over and kissed the warm cheek nearest her.

"How about Debby?" she asked. "What do you hear from her?"

"Debby is very happy and working hard."

"Has she any attachments?"

"You mean — a man?"

"A sweetheart — yes."

"I haven't heard of any."

"Then Debby and I will have to have the old maids' hall that you girls once promised to support. You've fudged — you and Kitty."

"And you will, too, Blue Bonnet, if I'm not mistaken, *some day!*"

Blue Bonnet shook her head and laughed.

"Oh, no, Amanda. I've often told you that marriage and settlement houses do not mix. It's me for spinsterhood. I shall be maiden aunt to all the We Are Sevens children."

"Yes — I fancy. Do you remember, Blue Bonnet, how we used to talk about what we'd say if we ever had a proposal?"

"Yes, indeed. You were going to say 'this is so sudden'! Did you say that, Amanda?"

"I don't remember. Probably I did — it *was* sudden."

"And Debby was going to say, 'ask mamma'!"

"And you were going to be a sister to all the men who asked you, Blue Bonnet."

"Yes — I'm the only one who will keep my word, I reckon."

They laughed softly for a minute. The old memories had taken them back to childhood. How far away that seemed in the light of Kitty's sorrow and Blue Bonnet's responsibilities.

Blue Bonnet sat thinking after Amanda left. The thought that dear old Dr. Clark was dead saddened her. How kind he had always been, and how everybody had loved him. What were the old people at the poor farm going to do without him. Blue Bonnet recalled the time she had bought the Victrola and how he had helped her get it out to the farm.

She got into a fresh waist after a while and went downstairs to tea. Aunt Lucinda had dinner at noon.

The table was attractive with its little pot of ferns in the center, and Delia smiled happily as she passed Blue Bonnet the flaky light rolls and helped her generously to the apricot marmalade —“golden glow,” Grandmother had always called it.

“It’s so nice to be here again, Delia,” she said over her shoulder, and Delia replied :

“It’s fine to have you, too, Miss Blue Bonnet. Katy was wondering only yesterday when you’d be coming down.”

After dinner Aunt Lucinda made herself comfortable in the big chair that her mother had always sat in, while Blue Bonnet played to her ; hymns and old-fashioned tunes, finally launching into her beloved Grieg and Mendelssohn. For over an hour she played, lost to time, and Sarah stitched away on her fancy work under the soft glow of the low light on the old-fashioned center table.

“This has been such a rest,” she said when she

finally let down the lid to the piano and paused in front of Aunt Lucinda to say good night. "There's nothing like the peace of this old house."

"I hope that you will run down often, Blue Bonnet," Miss Clyde said, almost wistfully. "We get a little lonely sometimes. I miss your Grandmother more as the time goes on."

"Yes — we all do. Of course, you and Sarah will come up next week to the opening of the Home."

"We hope to."

"It is to be very informal, but I want some kind of a ceremony."

"I suppose you are quite settled and ready to begin work?"

"Yes; that is, the furniture is all in. It's a beautiful place, Aunt Lucinda. I am sure you'll love it. And I know that Grandmother would be pleased — if only she could know."

"Perhaps she does know, dear."

"Perhaps. I hope so."

Blue Bonnet went upstairs to her room. It was still snowing. She could hear the icy flakes strike the window glass occasionally and the tap, tap, of the cherry-tree against the casement. It made her a little nervous and she went across the hall and coaxed Sarah to come over and visit for a while.

CHAPTER XVII

THE OPENING OF THE HOME

THE opening of the Home had been set for Thursday, the second of March, and on that day Blue Bonnet rose with the dawn. Not that there was much to be done — everything had been in place for two days, but excitement prevented sleep. She would not have admitted it to Uncle Cliff, not for worlds, but the enormity of her undertaking almost appalled her. It seemed gigantic, stupendous. Every time she had lapsed into sleep she had dreamed that she had the world on her shoulders and was trying to carry it so that it wouldn't tip or break or upset. Once she stumbled, and hundreds of little children toppled off, rolling down into the tenement district, where they were immediately gathered in by long-armed monsters who set them down in stifling sweat shops, or dirty factories to starve and die.

She looked a little pale when she came down to breakfast, and Uncle Cliff eyed her closely.

"You are undertaking too much," he said with concern. "I don't like it."

"It's just that I'm not used to responsibility, Uncle Cliff. I shan't mind it a bit after a while.

Mrs. Crawford, the matron, is going to be perfectly splendid, and Miss McCanne is an experienced resident worker. I won't have a thing to do but pay salaries and play with the children when we get to running."

But Uncle Cliff was doubtful.

Miss McCanne had been busy for almost two weeks. She had visited the entire neighborhood around the Home with the result that thirty children had been enrolled in the kindergarten, and a number of mothers had promised to avail themselves of the opportunities afforded in the day nursery.

The hour set for the opening was four o'clock. As Blue Bonnet had told Miss Clyde, there was to be little formality. The dining-room was bright with flowers, and Miss North — it had seemed so fitting to have Miss North preside, for it was through her that Blue Bonnet first became interested in settlement work — poured coffee, while Mrs. Howell, smiling and at home, served an ice, opposite.

A bevy of girls from Miss North's, including Carita, Mary Boyd, and Peggy Austin, passed sandwiches and cake. Joy Cross had charge of the dining-room.

Blue Bonnet stood beside her Aunt and Uncle Cliff in the kindergarten room to receive the guests. And, although she looked a little tired, her eyes were happy and there was a smile for every one.

John Churchill and Fanny Howell conducted

visitors through the building, explaining the use of the rooms and the general purpose of the undertaking.

It was a queer crowd, decidedly mixed. Tired women, wrapped in shawls or coats that had seen better days, walked side by side with fashionable folk, and little children, unkempt and ragged, dodged in and out between their elders to get a peep at the wonders of the new school.

Blue Bonnet had intended to have a young clergyman — Mr. Carter, who worked in the district — dedicate the building with a simple prayer, but her old love for the Bishop made her forego her idea of simplicity.

The Bishop's remarks befitted the occasion. He told — as Blue Bonnet had told him — something of the woman whose beautiful life had inspired so splendid a work; called attention to the bronze plate beside him which bore the name of Elizabeth Clyde, giving the date of her birth and death, and the purpose of the Home. It was to shelter little children; to be a refuge for weary women; to uplift the neighborhood; to instill ideals and standards. There followed a beautiful prayer, and lo, the desire of Blue Bonnet's life had come true. The old orphan asylum of her childhood dreams had materialized. Elizabeth Clyde Home opened its doors and its heart to suffering humanity, limited only by its capacity.

It was a wonderful moment for Blue Bonnet. For an instant she felt as if she were going to faint, as if the joy of it all would stop her heart. She felt smothered, choked; but Uncle Cliff's radiant smile and hearty, "Congratulations, Honey," brought her to her senses, and the next instant she was looking up into John Churchill's eyes, feeling the pressure of his hand on hers.

"May I be the first to offer congratulations?" he asked.

"I should like you to be the first, John. Only it should be the other way. *I* should be congratulating *you*. You have thought out the best there is to offer. It wouldn't be half what it is if it weren't for you."

"Nonsense!"

"It's true. You've given me so much help — and so much happiness."

A glad light sprang to Churchill's eyes; but there was no time to say what was in his heart, for others were crowding forward to extend their good wishes to Blue Bonnet.

She saw him an hour later: it was in her own little sitting-room, which she had reserved at the top of the building. There would be days when she wanted to rest at the Home; a place where she could change her street clothes for the blue linen uniform the nurses and Mrs. Crawford would wear.

She was having a little word with Gabriel. There

were tears in the child's eyes and his face was tragic in the waning afternoon light.

"It makes me think of my mother," he said, and winked back the tears manfully. "She lived in a place like this, and she used to cry in the night. She wanted my father to come back to us and he couldn't. He was dead."

Blue Bonnet was down on her knees before the child holding him close. It was at that instant John Churchill passed the door. Blue Bonnet wished that he would move on; she wanted to spare him the pain of Gabriel's memories, but he crossed the threshold quickly.

"Why, Partner," he said — it was his most endearing name for the lad — "what's the matter? What's gone wrong?"

The child threw himself into John's arms and clung to him passionately.

"I want to go away from here," he cried. "I don't like it. I want my mother; *my own mother*, Uncle John. She used to live in a place like this. It makes me homesick."

Blue Bonnet's eyes met John's over the child's head. There was silence for a moment, and then, "I think," she said slowly, "that this is the time to tell him, John. He needs you. It is the call of his blood to yours."

She went out of the room closing the door softly.

No one knew — ever would know — what tran-

spired behind that closed door. It was John's affair — and Gabriel's, solely.

It was an hour later that John left Gabriel at Blue Bonnet's door. The festivities at the Home were over. There were still traces of tears on the child's cheeks, and circles underneath his eyes told of strain and fatigue; but his step was light, and Blue Bonnet knew, *knew* without a word, that Gabriel had welcomed, not scorned, the tie that bound him to his uncle.

"Is it all right, Gabriel — everything?" she asked as she tucked him in bed and bent to kiss him good night.

"Yep," he answered shyly, and then, from underneath the sheet, "he's the bulliest uncle a feller could have. He's goin' to buy me a rifle, Blue Bonnet, and as soon as the weather clears up we're goin' shootin'. It's too bad you aren't a man. We'd take you along."

The days following the opening of the Home were so filled with work that Blue Bonnet often came home tired and worn. Uncle Cliff was inclined to be a little vexed; but her promise that things would run more smoothly in a little while reassured him.

The Home was gradually filling up. Mrs. Crawford was splendid in her department, and Miss McCanne — to use Blue Bonnet's own words — was

“a perfect dear.” She understood her work thoroughly, and under her direction boys’, girls’, and mothers’ clubs were being organized.

Miss North, with her usual interest, had asked Blue Bonnet if the girls at the school might not give a book tea for the benefit of the Home, and Blue Bonnet accepted the idea gladly. The Lambs offered to arrange the affair, Blue Bonnet having once been one of their number. Invitations were sent out to all their friends to come to tea on a certain day at Miss North’s and bring a book suitable for a child, with the result that the library was enriched with more than a hundred new volumes.

“Dear me,” Blue Bonnet said to Miss McCanne as they catalogued the books and placed them in the shelves; “how are we going to give them out in the neighborhood without a regular system? We really ought to have a librarian.”

“If you knew of some young woman who could give her afternoons it would be fine,” Miss McCanne answered.

Blue Bonnet thought a minute. “I believe I do, Miss McCanne. I have a friend in Woodford—a very dear friend who recently lost her father and mother. She is very lonely, and would so love to find something to do. I will write her to-night.”

So Kitty came to the Home, delighted to be of service, and to earn the small salary which, with her own income, enabled her to live comfortably.

Blue Bonnet fitted up the room she had saved for herself on the top floor for Kitty, for Kitty preferred to live at the Home. She found so many ways of being useful there. It was a snug little place, if it was in an undesirable part of the city, and Kitty learned to love it.

"I wonder if you'd mind if I'd bring up a few of my things from Woodford, Blue Bonnet?" she asked one day. "I want just a little of the old home about me."

And Blue Bonnet had answered quickly: "By all means, Kitty. Bring whatever you like and make yourself happy and comfortable."

So Kitty sent for the little sewing table that had been her mother's; the old-fashioned desk, two deep roomy chairs and her favorite pictures. The things transformed the room, and Kitty loved its homey atmosphere. There were a little tea service on a low wicker table; a copper kettle that sang merrily late in the afternoons, and a few of Kitty's own books. Not that she had much time to read; she had brought them along simply to remind her that she was in touch with old friends.

One night, it was early in April, just a week before the date set for her coming-out party, Blue Bonnet was called downstairs to see callers.

"Who is it, Hester?" she asked. There were no cards.

"I don't know, Miss Ashe. There is an old gen-

tleman and a young one — and Miss Clark from the Home.”

Blue Bonnet bounded down the stairs and the next second she was exclaiming breathlessly, “Oh, General, how do you do? And Alec — how perfectly splendid to see you both! Where did you come from?”

Alec explained — when he had a chance — that he was on a three days’ leave of absence to see his Grandfather safely settled in Woodford.

The General had failed. Blue Bonnet noticed it immediately.

“And who is going to look after you?” she asked.

“We were fortunate enough to get Margaret, Dr. Clark’s old housekeeper,” Alec answered for him. “She will make Grandfather very comfortable.”

“Of course she will, and Aunt Lucinda will see him often.”

The hour that followed was a happy one for all. There were the old days to talk over and future ones to be discussed. Amanda was right. Alec had changed wonderfully. He stood straight and tall, in perfect physical condition. One would scarcely have remembered that he had once been frail and ill.

“I understand that the doors of your institution are closed sharply at ten o’clock, Blue Bonnet. I must get Kitty back.”

"Yes; only please don't call it an *institution*, Alec. It's a *home* — not an *institution*!"

"Oh, I see. I beg your pardon."

"And I think Kitty might have a little leeway to-night. She has my permission to use the reception-room until eleven."

She flashed a smile at Kitty. It was so absurd to be giving Kitty permission to do anything.

"Thank you. Furloughs at present are at a premium. One must make hay while the sun shines."

Blue Bonnet went back up to her room with a smile on her lips. How queerly things turned out in this world. Little she thought in the old days — days when they were all children together — that Alec and Kitty would grow to care for each other. Little hot-tempered Kitty. But time and sorrow had softened all that. There were still occasional outbursts; but they were in moderation, and more often justifiable.

Blue Bonnet threw herself down on the couch to think. One by one the girls were pairing off, getting ready to make homes of their own. It made her wish — almost — but that was foolish, absolutely impossible. How could she contemplate marriage with the responsibilities piling up around her? Besides — she had noticed particularly of late — John Churchill's runabout stood in front of the Howells often in the late afternoons. Fanny was

looking unusually well, too. She seemed happy and gay —

A fluttering sigh finished the thought. Blue Bonnet suddenly found the couch uncomfortable. She got up, and, selecting a late novel, drew a deep chair close to the reading lamp and plunged into the middle of the book where the conversation seemed spirited and interesting. But even that palled presently, and she went across the hall to Carita's room.

Carita was shutting up shop for the night.

"May I come in?" Blue Bonnet asked. "Is it too late? I'm so fidgety. I don't want to read and I don't want to go to sleep."

Carita made her cosy and drew a chair up close.

"I was just going to see if your light was out," she said. "I wanted to talk with you, but I had to memorize some Shelley first. It's hard work, isn't it? Blue Bonnet, the loveliest thing happened to me to-day. Miss North thinks that after I graduate — of course, that's a year off yet — that she can get me a position with some friends of hers as a nursery governess. They have a little boy who will be ready for a teacher just about that time, and they asked Miss North to be on the lookout. Wasn't it fine that she felt she could offer me the chance?"

"Carita, you don't mean to say that you are thinking of leaving us next year?"

"Why — yes, Blue Bonnet. I've always ex-

pected to earn my living as soon as I was able. I couldn't go on living here — not after I was capable of earning money. *I have* to work, you know."

Blue Bonnet's eyes filled with sudden tears.

"It seems to me that every friend I have is either going to be married — or do something to put up a barrier. I shan't have a soul left."

"But you have *your* interests, Blue Bonnet. Look how busy you are."

The argument had weight.

"So I have, Carita. But it's going to be lonely without you. I had always thought of your staying on here — indefinitely."

The next half hour was spent in school gossip, and when Blue Bonnet finally went to her room her spirits were at low ebb.

CHAPTER XVIII

BLUE BONNET MAKES HER DÉBUT

PERHAPS the most exciting time in a girl's life is when she is presented to society: that is, if she has a reception given in her honor and all the attendant thrills.

Mrs. Howell had become just a little impatient at Blue Bonnet's delay and had urged her to set an early date for the coming-out party.

"It is all right for you to be so charmingly philanthropic, my dear child," she said, "but you must remember that all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy. Besides, you are only young once, and youth is very fleeting."

They were banalities Blue Bonnet had heard all her life, but she listened with a smile.

"I know, Mrs. Howell, and I dare say you are right. I do appreciate your kindness and will try to do you credit. Suppose we have the party right away — and have it over with. It scares me a little."

Mrs. Howell smiled indulgently.

"Very well. How about the tenth of April? This is the last week in March."

“It will suit me perfectly.”

Invitations were sent out, and Blue Bonnet spent hours in the shops selecting evening gowns and afternoon frocks.

“It’s such a bother,” she said to Mrs. White; “and I’m sure I shall not wear half of them, but one must be prepared.”

“You are tired now, Blue Bonnet,” Mrs. White answered. “I agree with Mrs. Howell that you need relaxation. I think you are going to have a better time this spring than you anticipate.”

The coming-out party was to be held at the Copley-Plaza, in the ballroom, and Boston’s most exclusive set was bidden. The party was to be in the form of a reception followed by dancing.

The festivities began in the morning. Blue Bonnet had barely finished breakfast when one florist after another began delivering flowers — such wonderful flowers — and some of the messages almost moved Blue Bonnet to tears. There were posies from Miss North and her old schoolmates; from Cousin Tracy, Cousin Augusta, and Cousin Honora; from Kitty and Alec. She viewed them with amazement.

“Why, Mrs. White,” she said, “I never dreamed that any one cared so much about me — it makes me want to cry.”

There was one box that she carried up to her room. It was not so pretentious as some of the

others, although it held a goodly lot of exquisite roses, and the card that accompanied it merely said, "With congratulations and best wishes for the success of the party, John Churchill," but Blue Bonnet lifted them out tenderly, and, if one had taken pains to notice, one would have found the pretty buds occupying a place on her dressing table — close, very close, to the pictures of her father and mother.

There was the excitement of dressing, too. Carita fluttered in and out of the room with admiring glances, and Mrs. White and Hester lent a hand. Even Fräulein was down on her knees in front of Blue Bonnet, smoothing out the fluffy ruffles of the charming white gown to a proper and becoming angle.

"Ach!" she cried, "but you are beautiful — *beautiful!*"

Blue Bonnet laughed happily.

"It makes me think of my first party at Miss North's," she said. "How I wish Annabel and Sue were here."

And just at that moment, as if the fates or the fairies had a hand in it, Uncle Cliff appeared at the door with a telegram in his hand.

"For you, Honey," he said; "more congratulations, I reckon. Anybody would think this was a wedding instead of a dance."

He put the message in Blue Bonnet's hand and she broke the seal hastily. She was but a moment

reading the words and then she gave such a sudden cry that Uncle Cliff took a step forward hastily.

"Listen," she cried, "all of you. *Listen!* See if I'm dreaming, or if it is really true:

"His Royal Highness William Vincent Hemp-hill, Jr., sends greetings to his Aunt Blue Bonnet, and thinks it rather a coincidence that his advent into society should so nearly coincide with hers. His mother, who is the happiest person in the State of Illinois, sends dearest love and congratulations."

"Uncle Cliff! Annabel! *A baby!*" she gasped. It took her some time to gather her scattered wits. She stood with open eyes and parted lips looking at first one, and then the other. It took some minutes to discover the little velvet case that reposed in her uncle's hand, and when he placed it in hers she took it dreamily.

"Well — aren't you going to open it, Honey?"

"Oh, Uncle Cliff, I beg your pardon. I'm sort of dazed. I can't get over it. To think that Annabel — *Annabel* —"

She paused suddenly, for she had opened the case and stood looking up into Uncle Cliff's face bewildered.

"For me," she gasped — "*for me?*"

"They were your mother's, Honey. I thought this might be as good a time as any to give them to you."

Blue Bonnet sank down in a chair and hugged the little box to her heart.

“Uncle Cliff — my mother’s! Oh, how I shall love them!”

She took forth a slender string of pearls and a beautiful diamond ring.

“Was this,” she asked — and her voice dropped to a whisper — “was this my mother’s engagement ring, Uncle Cliff?”

“Yes, Blue Bonnet.”

Mrs. White saw that tears were imminent and reached for the pearls. She clasped them about Blue Bonnet’s throat.

“I should wear them to-day, if I were you, dear. They are fitting and appropriate.”

“Yes — I should love to. How beautiful they are.” She shut the ring back in the box and handed it to Uncle Cliff. “Keep it for me,” she said. “We will talk about it at another time.”

Hester stood with Blue Bonnet’s long white coat open. Another instant and Blue Bonnet had slipped into it and stood ready. She made an excuse after they had all left her room, and running back selected two or three of the lovely roses on the dressing table. She started to pin them on her gown; but on second thought she put them back.

“I reckon it wouldn’t be just the thing,” she said in confidence to Algernon Sidney, who stood on the foot of her bed yawning prodigiously. “Fanny



" SHE CLASPED THEM ABOUT BLUE BONNET'S THROAT "

Howell might be wearing some of his, too." She glanced at the flowers longingly as she left the room.

One débutante's party is so exactly the counterpart of the other that it seems hardly necessary to describe Blue Bonnet's. She stood beside Mrs. Howell, smilingly gracious, acknowledging introductions. It was a great relief when Miss North appeared with Professor Howe and Joy Cross. She begged them to stop a moment for a word, but the crowd was too dense; they could only smile at her old friendliness and pass on.

When the procession had at last passed and Blue Bonnet had replied for perhaps the hundredth time that it was a beautiful day for a party, and that it was very nice indeed to be presented to Mrs. Howell's friends; that she loved Boston and enjoyed all it had to offer, she sank down on a chair beside Mrs. Howell to rest for a moment. She had barely touched the chair when Uncle Cliff appeared.

"Honey, who's going to have the first dance?" he asked.

"You are — if you want it."

Uncle Cliff drew himself up with pride.

"Do you think I'd dare fox-trot in this assemblage?"

"Why, of course! Why not?"

"And may I have the next dance?" John asked, his glance lingering on the flushed face and the merry eyes.

"You may — with pleasure. Is that the proper thing to say? I mustn't make any *faux pas*. I'm in society now. Please tell me if I break any New England conventions."

Uncle Cliff whirled her away before John had time to answer. He turned to face Jim Howell.

"Some little débutante," Jim drawled, nodding toward the fleeting figure. "I'm willing to wager that she will be the most popular bud produced this season. All that charm added to millions —"

Jim didn't finish the sentence; something in John's face stopped him.

"I fancy Miss Ashe will not indulge much in society after she's had a little whirl," John remarked. "She's not very keen for it."

"No; I dare say you are right, Churchill. But you watch the bids she'll get: Vincent club; Sewing Circle — whole blooming list of blue-blood privileges."

It was while Blue Bonnet was having an ice with Jim later that John crossed the room with Fanny. Two stout old ladies with backs to Blue Bonnet turned to watch them.

"Shouldn't wonder if that would be a match some day," one observed, not noticing Jim. "Nice, too — would unite two of our oldest families. They say John has the Churchill brains; won that big Farwell suit last month. He bids fair to rival his father in reputation. No — no money. I guess

they used it all up searching for the girl that married the foreigner. That broke the old Judge's heart. Helen was the apple of his eye. You remember her . . . pretty girl . . ."

Blue Bonnet gave her unfinished ice to an attendant and rose.

"Shall we finish our dance, Jim?" she asked, avoiding his eyes. "It's too bad to miss this music for refreshments."

From that time on Blue Bonnet saw little of John. She had two dances with him, that was all; but when they came to go he found her and stopped for a moment to say good-by.

"Well — enjoy it?" he asked.

"Very much — only —" she held up her fan and he bent his head to catch what she had to say. "I'm mighty thankful it's over. I think it scared me a little. How am I ever — *ever* going to remember the names of all these people? And if I remember the names I can't put the faces with them."

John laughed at her tragic face.

"I fancy they will all know you," he replied, much to Blue Bonnet's comfort. "All you'll have to do will be to acknowledge their bows pleasantly."

He was starting to leave when she reached out and touched him on the arm. "John," she said, and half hesitated, "have you an engagement now — to-night, I mean?"

"No; why?"

"Wouldn't you like to come home with us? We're not going to have any dinner — not after all these refreshments, but we might manage a late supper on the chafing dish — a rarebit, perhaps. I feel restless — as if I wanted to do something more."

"Thank you, I'd like to come very much."

"And I might ask Mrs. Howell and Fanny — Jim and the Judge, too, if they would come."

She rather marveled that he hesitated at this plan.

"Or shall we just have the family to-night; one of the old home evenings with some music before the fire? You haven't heard Gabriel play for some time. Really, he's quite wonderful. You'll be pleased."

"That would be delightful, Blue Bonnet. I shouldn't like to exclude the Howells from anything so pleasant, but —"

"Oh, I can ask them over Sunday evening. I intended to anyway."

An hour later Blue Bonnet's family might have been seen cozily ensconced before a cheerful fire — a very complete family, for Aunt Lucinda and Sarah Blake had come up from Woodford for the party. Blue Bonnet had not changed her dress. She was a charming picture as she sat at the piano accompanying Gabriel, the white ruffles of her party dress billowing about her, her face reflecting pride in Gabriel's achievement.

"Don't you think that's pretty fine, Uncle John?" Gabriel asked as the last strains died away. "And doesn't Blue Bonnet play the best accompaniment? Some day — when I'm a man and Blue Bonnet's a lady — a *big* lady —"

"She's that to-day, Partner," John observed, laughing. "A very *big* lady! You look in the papers to-morrow and see if she isn't."

"We're going to play in concerts — down in Texas — for cowboys and people," Gabriel finished, ignoring the interruption.

"That will be fine. Won't you play in Boston, too, so I may have the pleasure of hearing you?"

"Maybe — will we, Blue Bonnet?"

Blue Bonnet caught the boy in her arms and pressed her cheek against his.

"I'm afraid we'd have to improve a lot, before we have an opportunity, dear," she answered.

"Of course; but we'll have time to improve before I grow up."

"At the rate you're going now, Gabriel, I feel sure we shall hear you," John encouraged. "Keep up the work."

Gabriel took his silk handkerchief and polished his violin carefully, laid the instrument away in the case and put out his hand to John.

"The rifle was a peach, Uncle John," he said. "I can hardly wait to shoot it. Spring's a long time coming, isn't it?"

"Not long now, Gabriel. To-day was beautiful."

Gabriel gathered up Algernon Sidney, who was showing his pink tongue in a sleepy yawn, and started up the steps slowly. Blue Bonnet and John watched him until he turned on the landing.

"He's such a darling," Blue Bonnet whispered when he was out of hearing. "So sweet and gentle—and so honorable. Everything about Gabriel is absolutely above board. His father *must* have been fine, John."

Carita was the next to leave the room. Blue Bonnet called to her as she reached the stairs. "Won't you stay and have some supper, Carita? I'm going to get it ready in just a few minutes."

"I'll come down when it's ready, Blue Bonnet. I'm going to struggle with some of the poets for a while now."

In the den Uncle Cliff, Mrs. White, Aunt Lucinda, and Sarah were having a rubber of bridge.

"Would you like to help me?" Blue Bonnet asked John. "I'm going into the pantry to get the sandwiches. You may start the chafing dish if you will."

John followed her into the dining-room and watched her as she set the table. When the chafing dish was going properly she handed him the basket of silver and instructed him as to where each piece

went. The sandwiches went on the table, and the cheese was minced for the rarebit.

"It's such fun to keep house," Blue Bonnet said, removing the coffee service from the sideboard to the table. "I quite envy Amanda. She is going into a little apartment in New York next winter and do all her own work."

"She is to be envied."

"It must be wonderful — just two people — two out of all the world — and so much to each other."

John was silent.

"It seems as if all my friends are getting married: Amanda" — Blue Bonnet counted them off on her fingers — "and Kitty — and the other day Sue announced her engagement to '*the Billings person*,' as Patty Paine used always to call him." She laughed softly.

Still John was silent. He had picked up a silver spoon and stood tapping the table with it gently. He was evidently lost in thought.

"And, I suppose — some day — you will be leaving us, too — marrying —"

He lifted his face now, and the lines about his mouth tightened.

"I think not," he said slowly. "That is out of the question — for me."

"Why out of the question?"

"Do you want to know, Blue Bonnet?"

"Of course — if —"

"It is because the only girl that I ever cared for in my life — ever could care for — is going to marry another man."

Blue Bonnet took a step back and eyed him in amazement.

"Another man!" she gasped. "*Fanny?* I didn't know she ever had another sweetheart!"

"*Another!*" It was John's turn to show amazement.

For a half second they stood looking at each other, stupefied, wondering.

"There seems to be some mistake," John said at last. "I was not referring to Fanny. Is she to be married — also?"

"Why, I thought so — I thought that maybe — some day — you would marry her. You are such good friends."

"Just that." John laughed shortly. "No; I was not speaking of Fanny, though I admire her very much."

"Oh, it was some one you knew abroad — perhaps."

His glance was very clear and direct as he answered:

"You are the only girl I ever cared for in my life, Blue Bonnet. I hesitated to tell you for a long time — for two reasons: you were so young that I feared you might not know your own heart — and then — you were rich and I was poor. I

had so little to offer you. When the time came — when I could look into the future and see my way to success a little clearer, it was too late.”

“Too late — I don’t understand.”

“The night in San Francisco — at the Congressional ball — I overheard Patterson speaking to you in the garden — heard your answer. I have wanted to offer my congratulations so many times — but I couldn’t.”

There was a deathly stillness. Blue Bonnet seemed to be trying to collect her scattered senses. Out in the hall Grandfather’s clock ticked regularly, and over the silence came Mrs. White’s clear voice: “I double your hearts, Mr. Ashe,” and his response, “I double back.”

“In the garden, you say — in the forbidden garden? I don’t quite understand,” Blue Bonnet faltered.

“It is a little embarrassing for me to explain. I assure you I could not help overhearing. You moved on quickly — but not before I had caught your words.”

“My words?”

“You told Patterson that he might speak with your uncle in the morning. I took it he was asking you to marry him. His actions — rather warranted it.”

A little rippling laugh came from Blue Bonnet’s throat and her face flushed.

"I remember now," she said. "He was very presumptuous, and I was annoyed. But you were mistaken — *very much mistaken*. He was only asking me to get up a party to go through the Muir woods at Mill Valley the next day. I remember perfectly. He had teased for some time, and when I finally consented he was more enthusiastic than the occasion warranted, I admit, but "— she broke off suddenly, leaving the sentence unfinished. Her brow was clearing. A new light was dawning.

"That was why you left so suddenly? I never could understand, and I worried. You don't know how I worried — because — oh, surely you know why — *I care, too, John — so much — so very much.*"

She finished the words in the arms that reached and held her close. When she looked up into the shining eyes above, her own were equally radiant.

"And *you* care, too," he said wonderingly — as if the thought were beyond comprehension: "*you love me, Blue Bonnet?*"

"So very, very much, John," came the shy sweet answer.

"And will you be my wife?"

"If you very much want me — but you'll have to take the settlement house, too. I can't give that up."

"There'll be no need, Blue Bonnet. *My own Blue Bonnet.*"

The preparations for supper progressed slowly after that. There were so many things to discuss; so many plans to talk over. An hour later Sarah came into the dining-room and announced that "Mr. Ashe said if supper wasn't ready pretty soon, they might as well wait for breakfast."

"It's ready right this minute," Blue Bonnet answered happily. "We had an accident. John neglected to stir the rarebit and it went stringy" (Sarah wondered why she blushed so furiously); "we had to make it over. I'm doing it myself this time, and it's fine."

Sarah also wondered why John laughed; but Sarah was an unsuspecting soul, and she went back to the dining-room quite oblivious to the cause.

The house had settled down for the night when Blue Bonnet ran across the hall and knocked softly at Uncle Cliff's door.

"Uncle Cliff," she called in a whisper, "have you gone to bed?"

"No, Honey, what is it?"

"May I come in — just for a minute?"

"Of course." He held the door wide.

Blue Bonnet slipped inside, gently closing it.

"May I sit here?" she asked, perching on the arm of his big chair. "I — I want to tell you something, Uncle Cliff. Won't you sit down here beside me? I might want to whisper it. I will, if I get stage fright."

Mr. Ashe looked up quickly. If Blue Bonnet had only known, a quiver went through his heart.

"What is it, Blue Bonnet?" he asked, taking the chair.

Blue Bonnet nestled her brown head close beside the silvering one.

"Uncle Cliff, you remember — a long time ago — last autumn, we made a bargain, you and I. You said that — that you'd never marry until I did, didn't you?"

"Something like that, Honey."

"And *I* said that *I never* would marry, didn't I?"

"I believe so — yes."

"Well — I'm afraid I've changed my mind. I want to take it back, Uncle Cliff. You see, John wants me to marry *him*, and I think I want to. I know it's awfully sudden, but I didn't know myself until to-night, and — well, I reckon that's all there is to it."

Uncle Cliff didn't speak for a minute; when he did he was direct and to the point.

"You love him, Honey — you are sure?"

Blue Bonnet looked down at him from her perch on his chair and her eyes filled with tears.

"I don't know very much about love, Uncle Cliff, but I feel, I *know* that I could take John's hand and go to the end of the earth and be happy."

"That's all you need say, Honey."

"But I'll never leave *you*, Uncle Cliff. You may

be sure of that. We'll all live here together — *here*, in John's old home. Somehow it all seems so *right* and as it should be. John and Gabriel both back in the old home where they ought to be."

Mr. Ashe puffed at his cigar for some minutes in silence; then he reached up and brought Blue Bonnet's face close to his own.

"I hope you will be very happy, Honey. You have my blessing. If it must be any one, I'm glad it's John."

Blue Bonnet patted his head without replying. The caress spoke volumes.

"I must run away to bed now," she said presently. "This has been a long day and a full one. I shall put down April tenth in my diary in red ink. It's been a red-letter day, hasn't it?"

CHAPTER XIX

SETTLEMENT WORK

NEARLY six months had slipped by since that night in the dining-room when Blue Bonnet had so suddenly discovered that she, not Fanny Howell, was John Churchill's choice for a lifemate — six happy months. Spring had come and gone; summer had gradually waned, and autumn — the most beautiful time of all the year — was present with golden lights and warm, blue-gray skies.

Part of the summer had been spent at the seashore; not all, for Blue Bonnet could not leave the Home entirely to the care of assistants. Mrs. Crawford needed a vacation, and Miss McCanne and Kitty were looking a bit drawn with the warm weather; so Mrs. White and Blue Bonnet relieved them of duty in July, hot as it was, running the house quite satisfactorily in their absence.

It had been hard; but Blue Bonnet insisted that it was good to be a working woman once in a while and learn the value of hardships. It made one's sympathies keener, one's joys rarer. The servants at the Home had been freshened by vacations, so they helped with renewed vigor.

The Home was growing wonderfully. It was the delight of Blue Bonnet's life to wander into the day nursery at the hour when the babies were being changed from begrimed, illy-clad little bundles of flesh into clean, rosy, wholesome human beings. A bath and clean clothes will transform any child, and show up undreamed of possibilities. Blue Bonnet loved to look at the infants in the tiny beds, and to note the improvement day by day.

The kindergarten was interesting, too, many of the children intelligent and handsome. There was one little mother that Blue Bonnet hugged to her heart whenever she came near her; little six-year-old Freda Grieger. It is impossible to think of a six-year-old child mothering two younger children, but Freda actually did. Hans, her brother, was but four, and Gretchen so tiny that she spent her time crowing and grabbing for her little pink toes up in the day nursery, where the nurses made a pet of her.

Freda's entrance to the school had been rather unusual. Blue Bonnet, in rounding the corner to the Home one morning, saw a poorly clad, distressed-looking child climbing the stairs to a dirty tenement. Noticing that she carried an infant in her arms, and that a smaller child clung to her ragged skirt, Blue Bonnet called to her. The child gave one glance backward, and, taking a tighter grip on the baby, sped up the stairs, urging the little lad forward with startled cries.

Blue Bonnet followed quickly. She caught the three on the first landing, just as they were entering a barren, dark room. The child reached the door first, and pushing the boy inside with eager haste, stepped over the threshold and banged the door in Blue Bonnet's face. The next instant a key slipped in the lock.

Blue Bonnet looked bewildered. She was about to turn back, down the dirty stairs, when a woman put her head out of a neighboring door and gave her a scathing glance.

"What y' want?" she asked harshly.

"I want to know who that little girl is that just went in that room. Why is she carrying that heavy baby around the streets? It's a shame! She doesn't look able."

The woman came out of the room and stood, dirty and slovenly, before Blue Bonnet. "That's her business," she said sharply. "I suppose you want to get the kid in one of these Homes around here. Well, you ain't going to. Freda's going to keep the baby, if it's any comfort to her."

"Why, where's her mother?" Blue Bonnet asked surprised.

"Dead," came the laconic answer.

"Where's her father?"

"Dead; pretty tough, ain't it?"

"Who takes care of the children?"

"Freda does — what care they get."

"What! *that baby* — that little five or six year old girl?"

"Yes; we all helps what we can. We ain't none of us millionaires, but we kin share a crust now and then."

"Tell me about the child, won't you?" Blue Bonnet asked so gently that the woman came a step closer.

"She's probably listenin'," she said, nodding toward Freda's door. "Her mother died about three weeks ago. They hadn't been here long from Germany. They can hardly speak a word of English. That's what makes it so hard for the poor kid, and she's scared to death for fear somebody's going to swipe the little feller and the baby from her. She stays locked up in that room half the time."

Blue Bonnet thought for a minute.

"I think I can help the child," she said with such sincerity that the woman looked up confidently. "And I promise not to separate the family. Will you get her into your room in a little while — coax her, *please*, and I will repay you."

She took a piece of silver from her purse and put it into the woman's hands. Then she hurried down stairs, straight to the Home and to the telephone.

"Hester," she said, when she got the line, "please have Simpkins bring Fräulein to the Home immediately. I need her."

A little over a half hour later Fräulein and Blue

Bonnet, climbing the same dirty stairs, paused, not at Freda's door, but the one beyond.

In a corner Freda sat, the baby still in her lap, the boy holding to her skirts.

Blue Bonnet, regardless of the dirty floor, dropped on her knees beside the children.

"Speak to her, Fräulein," she commanded. "Tell her all that I told you."

At the first word of her native tongue the horror vanished from Freda's terror-stricken eyes, and presently she began to answer in monosyllables.

"Yes. No," was all Blue Bonnet could distinguish at first, but slowly — very slowly — she began to respond to Fräulein's outpouring, and suddenly Fräulein turned in triumph.

"She says she will come with you if you will put your hand on your heart and say that you will not take the children from her. She says she promised her mother not to leave them, and she *will* not, even if they all starve together."

Blue Bonnet went through the required form, smiling encouragement into the child's watchful eyes, and together they proceeded to the Home.

That had been in the early summer. Freda was looking stronger now, and picking up English in a manner that amazed her teacher. The baby had been put in the nursery; Freda and little Hans in the kindergarten. It was impossible to take care of the children at night, so the tenement room had been

scrubbed and furnished, and Freda — aged six — set up housekeeping, guarding her brother and small sister with the same avidity that she had exhibited on the morning Blue Bonnet found her.

She was sunny and happy now, and the interest of the school centered around her. She accepted the warm lunch furnished at the Home in the morning and the milk for the baby. But with the pluck and ability of her race, bent her efforts toward providing for her charges, and sold papers on the street after school hours.

“I wish we could make room for Freda at the Home,” Blue Bonnet said to Mrs. Crawford, “but it seems impossible.”

“There are many Freda’s in the neighborhood, Miss Ashe,” Mrs. Crawford responded. “You couldn’t take them all in. We will keep an eye on the children. They will not suffer.”

There were other interests at the Home. Blue Bonnet loved to go down once a month with Mrs. White and play for the girls to dance; shop and factory girls who were members of the Club. She enjoyed the evenings when lecturers of note gave their services.

She had been surprised and delighted one day to receive a telephone call from Wee Watts.

“May I come and read to your girls at the Home some night,” she asked. “I’m only in Boston for a few weeks; but I’d so love to, Blue Bonnet.”

"Oh, Wee, if you only would!" Blue Bonnet answered. And she had called for her at her hotel, visiting every foot of the way to the Home. There were so many reminiscences; so many happy hours at Miss North's to be talked over.

And society, rather to Blue Bonnet's surprise, interested her. She enjoyed the girls she met, teas were a diversion after a busy morning at the Home. Jim Howell had been right: she was invited everywhere; doors opened to her.

She had joined the Sewing Circle; a fashionable element of society that took in desirable débutantes — desirable from the standpoint of family and lineage.

Her engagement, which had not been announced until September, created quite a furore; though it was not unexpected. John had been very attentive to her at the various functions they attended; friends had become accustomed to seeing them together.

The days were scarcely long enough to hold all Blue Bonnet's pleasure — to contain the happiness. There were long evening hours spent with John in the old living-room; when he read aloud while she sewed; for Cousin Honora's Hope chest occupied a prominent place in Blue Bonnet's bedroom now, and was gradually being filled with fine lingerie and monogrammed linen.

"Don't you think," John said one evening — it was in early October and they were enjoying the first

open fire of the season — “that we could set our wedding day soon, Blue Bonnet? You promised that it should not be later than spring, but why wait?”

“How soon, John?” she questioned, glancing up from the napkin she was putting a small A on neatly. Blue Bonnet’s work was improving.

John bent forward eagerly and stopping one of the hands in its eager endeavor, held it close.

“*Very soon* — the sooner the better! November, if possible.”

“Oh, John — *November?* Why, November is almost here!”

“Exactly.”

“And it isn’t a marrying month, John. No one ever gets married in November. It’s cold and horrid.”

“Couldn’t we set the fashion?”

“But I’d always wanted to be married in June, when the roses are all in bloom. I’ve planned it so many times. I want to be married in this room, early in the morning, with the windows open wide and the sunshine streaming in, and the birds singing out in the yard.”

John looked disappointed.

“There’s never any sunshine in *November* — not to speak of, in Boston. It’s gray and disagreeable. Oh, I must have the sunshine and the birds, John. I should be quite miserable without them — unless”

— she looked up with a happy smile — “ unless we could go directly to the ranch. The sun will be shining in Texas.”

“ Please — please try to manage it,” John pleaded. “ It seems so foolish to wait for sunshine and birds, Blue Bonnet — when I need you.”

Blue Bonnet looked up archly: “ Well,” she said, “ I’ll take it under advisement. Perhaps I’ll write you a letter about it.”

“ *Please*; write it to-night.”

The idea of the letter was not all a joke; a good many found their way to and from the Brookline house; little scraps of sentiment, dear to the heart of each.

The very next day, much to John’s delight, a square envelope, with Blue Bonnet’s familiar handwriting, lay on his desk at the office. He broke the seal hastily.

What he sought was not far from the heading; and he almost held his breath as he read: “ Would the fifteenth of November be all right?” It gives me very little time to get a trousseau, but if we go to the ranch for a month, I shan’t need one. Please let me know if you think this is a good date, and if you can get away at that time.”

It is needless to add that a special messenger carried back the answer immediately; but it would be hardly fair to chronicle all the note contained. There are some communications too sacred for alien eyes.

The days that followed were naturally busy ones; Blue Bonnet and Mrs. White were deep in the mysteries of chiffons and laces, of materials suitable for tailored suits, of hats and wraps, for, despite Blue Bonnet's lack of time, a trousseau was fast being gathered, and a very charming and suitable one.

But there came a day in the midst of the shopping when Mrs. White was not able to join Blue Bonnet. She was ill—too ill to leave her room, and Blue Bonnet was lost without her.

“It seems so strange,” Blue Bonnet said to Uncle Cliff; “she was all right yesterday, only a little tired, of course—we have been going at such a pace—and she seemed well and happy.” Blue Bonnet came into the den and closed the door softly. “Do you know, Uncle Cliff, I believe Mrs. White is in trouble, for last night, just before I went to bed, I took a letter up to her; Hester had been careless and got it mixed with my mail. It had a foreign postmark, and when I gave it to her she turned so white that I thought she was going to faint. I wanted to stay with her but she didn't ask me, and I left her. This morning she was not able to come downstairs, and when I took her coffee up she was still white and weak.”

Mr. Ashe's dark brows met in a frown, but he merely said, “Perhaps, Honey; be as kind to her as you can.”

It was late that night, after Blue Bonnet had retired, weary and still a bit worried, that Alicia White dressed and came down into the den where Mr. Ashe sat, reading and smoking.

"Will I disturb you if I come in?" she asked. "I'll only keep you a few minutes. I wanted to explain — to tell you — that Cranston White is dead. I received the news last night."

She almost staggered to a chair, and held out an open letter.

Mr. Ashe glanced at the writing, puzzled.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," she reached for the letter, "I will translate it for you. It is in French, of course.

"It is dated August 28th, and sent from Bous-sieres, Doubes, France, and begins:

" 'DEAR MADAME:

" 'I have the honor to address you in behalf of your late husband, Monsieur Cranston White. I accept with sorrow the unhappy task which falls to me of acquainting you with the intelligence of his death at Cassel. He was taken prisoner at the battle of Soissons in June. Confined at Cassel, he contracted typhoid fever, and died there the 7th of July, this year.

" 'I had never the honor to meet your amiable husband, but I have many accounts of his gallantry from my honorable "mari" (her own hus-

band) who fell wounded in the same battle, and died three days later. Who can know better than I, dear Madame, the grief this news will bring you, I, who have been witness to so many scenes of carnage and privation. But perhaps you have not children to be left without the father as I. My little Renée is but two years old, and Madeleine and Marcel, eleven and twelve, are yet too young to put to the shoulder the responsibilities of a family. But I must not impose to you my sorrow.

“ ‘Through my cousin, the young Charles Helfer, who was in the same regiment with Monsieur White, I have the particulars of the death, and the account of Monsieur White’s bravery on the battlefield; of the great love of the comrades for him. Herewith I take the liberty of returning to you two letters which my cousin has transported to me; he having been confined in the hospital which gave shelter to your respected husband.

“ ‘I pray, in closing, dear Madame, that your heart may be strengthened for this burden, and I beg you to be willing to accept my expression of deepest sympathy and most respectful salutations.

“ ‘LOUISE DE L’ARGENTIERE,

“ ‘VEUVE, LASSALLE.’ ”

From the envelope Alicia drew another letter, begrimed and torn — her own letter to Cranston White written from Carmel-by-the-Sea, in Novem-

ber, and still another, a mere scrap; the scrawl of a dying soldier. She read the note between short, quick sobs.

“‘ALICIA:

“‘This will be my last earthly word to you; the sands are running low, at last. My good friend, Charles Helfer, will see that news of my death reaches you. I thank you for your letter; you will never know what it has meant to me. I give my life to France gladly — but I could pass into the unknown happier if your smile lighted the way; if I could look in your eyes and know that I am truly forgiven for the suffering I have caused you. My love, unworthy though it has been, is yours,— to the end.’”

The signature was barely legible, the note so disconnected that it took an effort to read it. When Alicia finished she rose and stood in the door, white and weary. “I only wanted you to know of his passing,” she said, “because I told you about him that day at the ranch. I took your advice. I wrote him to come back; that we would try to make right the old differences. But, you see, it was too late — *too late*.” The last word escaped in a sigh, and she turned, leaving the room before Mr. Ashe could utter a word, or extend his sympathy.

CHAPTER XX

JOY AND SORROW

THE preparations for Blue Bonnet's wedding went on merrily. It was with delight that she received a letter from Annabel one morning saying that she believed it would be possible for her to accept Blue Bonnet's invitation to be matron of honor. Little Billy was so robust and well, and she had such an excellent trained nurse that she felt quite comfortable about leaving him; besides if it were at all necessary, her mother would gladly come and stay during the period of her absence.

Blue Bonnet carried the letter to John with joy.

"Now," she said, "my cup of happiness is overflowing. I only needed Annabel to complete it."

They were busy addressing a pile of invitations at the time, for the wedding was but three weeks away, and Blue Bonnet glanced up to catch the smile on John's face. Something in his expression reminded her of what Sivrouka, the astrologist, had told her at the Exposition.

"John," she said, and laughed at the recollection, "did any one ever tell you that you had friendly eyes?"

"Not that I recall," he answered, diving into the pile of envelopes.

"Or that your mouth was humorous?"

"No; no one but your Cousin Honora. When I was a little shaver she used to say, 'Always keep the corners of your mouth turned up, Johnny'; she always calls me Johnny."

Blue Bonnet laughed merrily. "How funny; but you *did* keep them turned up, didn't you—*Johnny*?"

"Perhaps nature assisted me."

"Do you remember the day we went into the tent at the Exposition and had our fortunes told—that wonderful old Sivrouka? He was a wise old fellow, say what you please. Some things are coming true."

John looked skeptical—men never believe in prophets.

"What, for instance?" he asked. "I hope he said you were going to be married and live happy ever after."

"Yes—he did. He said also—that—that I was going to have a worry—a *great* worry—but that the light would break, suddenly in a glory."

"And did you have a worry? I thought you had been especially free from that sort of thing, Blue Bonnet."

"Well"—Blue Bonnet avoided his eyes, and a little warm blush came to her cheeks—"if you want to know, it wasn't any great pleasure to think

for six or seven months that you were going to marry Fanny Howell. I didn't just — *enjoy the thought!*”

A tender light leaped into John's eyes. “Did you care — that much, Blue Bonnet?”

“I can't remember when I didn't care, John,” she said, with her usual honesty. “I think it began way back — the time we came to see the house and you blew the dust off the books and gathered the scattered things up from this very table. I liked the way you did it — there was something about you —” she broke off suddenly, and then went on: “I reckon it was your *friendly* eyes, and your *humorous* mouth and your nice capable hands and — your *conventional ways*,” she finished, laughing.

“Thank you — I'm glad to know that it was the *conventional* in me that appealed. I always fancied that discounted any virtues.”

“No; I think I rather respected that. I suppose you don't remember when — when you first began to care for me?”

John looked straight into the blue eyes lifted now to his.

“Yes — I can. I can go back — a half hour beyond your own beginning; it was almost — the moment I saw you. No one — *no girl*, any way — had ever appealed to me as you did. I liked your directness and your simplicity; you seemed so unspoiled and sincere and understanding. By the

way, may I ask, if it isn't too inquisitive, whatever became of Patterson? He has my sympathy, Blue Bonnet. And talk about *worry*." — He threw up his hands in a gesture that made words unnecessary.

"Randall," Blue Bonnet said dreamily; "you knew, of course, that he was in Chile — and doing splendidly. I had a letter from Mary Louise just the other day. They are still at Carmel. She said that she was at last reconciled to Randall's going away (she was so unhappy about it at first) because he was so delighted with his work, and that he was pretty certain to make a big name for himself down there."

"Good enough! I knew that he had it in him — rather a charming fellow — viewed from a distance."

"I thought you didn't like him."

"I like him in Chile — I never was fond of corollaries."

"And Mary Louise is still as happy as people ever get to be in this world. It rather encourages one to take the step we are taking, doesn't it?"

"You aren't afraid, Blue Bonnet?"

"No; John — there's only one thing — Uncle Cliff! I'm afraid he is going to feel lonely, even though we are all here together. It will never be quite the same."

"But he seems happy, pleased, doesn't he?"

"Yes — Uncle Cliff is always happy if I am."

You know, I don't feel as I once did about his getting married. I'm so happy myself that I almost wish — that he might find some one to be happy with, too. I told him the other night that if that time ever came I wanted him to feel that I would be glad."

"And what did he say?"

"Nothing — except that — well, I couldn't just fathom his expression."

Between the work at the settlement house — for she insisted upon making a daily trip there — and the preparations for the wedding, Blue Bonnet scarcely knew where the time went. She was up every morning at seven, making her preparations for the day before breakfast.

She came down one morning about ten days before the time set for the wedding to see Uncle Cliff reading the morning paper with a frown. She hardly knew what attracted her attention to his expression, perhaps it was that he seemed distressed.

"Anything wrong, Uncle Cliff?" she asked, and he had answered in confusion. When the meal was over he asked her to come into the den a moment.

"I am so sorry, Honey," he began — "so sorry to tell you of an accident that has happened to one of the children at the Home; but you will know of it very soon, and it is best for me to tell you."

"Oh, Uncle Cliff, what is it?" There was alarm in her voice.

Mr. Ashe put the morning paper in her hand unhesitatingly, marking a paragraph with his finger.

Blue Bonnet read the notice hastily, overcome with emotion before she had finished. It said: "Hans Grieger, four years old, and his infant sister, who lost their real mother several months ago, lost their 'little mother' last night under the wheels of an automobile in front of their home. Since the death of their mother the children have been in the care of their sister Freda, six years old, and she had her little charges at the entrance to the tenement, where they were returning from the Elizabeth Clyde Home. A grocer, who does not know how valuable a soap box is to such a family, extravagantly and wastefully threw it into the street. Freda, knowing the value of such things as the little mother of a family, ran into the street to save the box and she was run down and killed by a passing automobile."

"Oh, Uncle Cliff," Blue Bonnet cried brokenly, "our little Freda, *our dear little Freda!*" She burst into passionate tears, and it was some time before she could get courage to go down to the Home and assist Mrs. Crawford with arrangements that she knew would be necessary for a funeral. Death was so foreign to her, she shrank from the ordeal with horror.

Uncle Cliff, too, dreaded to have her nerves so harrowed and begged her to remain at home; but,

finding that she was determined, finally went with her.

The Home was in a state of confusion, although the teachers were trying hard to maintain the customary order and discipline. In the nursery the baby smiled and played with her rosy toes, too young to realize her sorrow. Hans, wide-eyed and troubled, sat at one of the tables in the kindergarten room, occasionally asking for Freda. He knew that something had happened, but he was unable to comprehend the extent of his bereavement.

Blue Bonnet went up to Kitty's room with Miss McCanne to talk over the situation and plan for the last courtesy she would be able to extend to poor little Freda. Miss McCanne was calm and business-like. She had seen so much of tragedy in her five years of settlement work that she had learned to control her feelings.

Before Blue Bonnet left the building a simple service had been arranged for, and the next morning she returned with John to listen to one of the most touching, beautiful sermons she had ever listened to.

Mr. Carter, the young clergyman who worked in the tenement district, took for his text: "And He went down into His garden and plucked a lily." He told how out of the deepest, blackest soil the beautiful flower grows; how out of the filth and squalor, out of the sin and evil of the tenement, this little white soul had blossomed; shed its sweetness for a

day and was taken — as the lily — from its dark roots and tiny tendrils, to bloom again in a fairer, lovelier garden sheltered from cruel winds and unwholesome surroundings.

There was something so comforting in the words, so satisfying in the young man's message that one almost felt glad — not sorry, that Freda's cares and trials were over — that she was already reaping the reward of a loving heart ; had found the home of the brave and the loyal.

And so, in the midst of joy, sorrow crept, which is the way of life.

CHAPTER XXI

UNEXPECTED GUESTS

CONTRARY to Blue Bonnet's first thought in the matter, preparations for a church wedding were being carried out.

"As long as I can't have the spring and the open windows and the birds," she said to John, "I might just as well go to the other extreme and have all the people I want at a church. There will be a good many; the old girls and teachers from Miss North's, and some of the new friends I have made in Boston. Then there are all your father's and mother's friends, whom you will wish to ask, of course."

John was very glad to have the old friends; it almost compensated for the ordeal of a church wedding, which is always so far from the masculine ideal.

During Blue Bonnet's senior year at Miss North's she had become a communicant of Trinity church, so it was arranged to have the marriage ceremony performed there by the Bishop.

"I have always thought how lovely it would be to have the We Are Sevens for bridesmaids if I ever should marry," she said to Aunt Lucinda, "but there

are so few of us left. Kitty's recent bereavement would make her hesitate, Debby is in far off Wisconsin, and Ruth and Susy have been gone from Woodford so long that I have lost touch with them. There's Amanda; but I shouldn't like to single her out from all the rest, and Sarah is a darling, but — ”

“ I should arrange my wedding just as I wanted it,” Aunt Lucinda said emphatically. “ That is one time a girl should have things exactly as she wants them.”

“ And you think no one would take offense? ”

“ Certainly not.”

“ Then I shall have everything as simple as possible, Aunt Lucinda: Carita shall be bridesmaid, for she is as near — or nearer — to me than any one else, and Annabel matron of honor.”

So it was arranged. Colors were chosen — green and white for the decorations and pale pastel shades for the bridesmaid and matron of honor. It was a busy time, and the house seemed transformed with many activities. On the third floor sewing machines whirled busily from morning until night, and Hester was kept busy receiving packages and boxes from stores and messengers.

“ I'll be glad when it's all over,” Gabriel complained, catching hold of Blue Bonnet as she flew through the halls and upstairs. “ You don't have any time to practice with me or anything, and Uncle Cliff's as blue as can be! ”

"Gabriel, is he? Oh, I'm so sorry! I have neglected you all shamefully, but getting married means such a lot of work. Just wait until I come back from the ranch. We'll have the most beautiful times in the evenings. We'll play all your new things and practice by the hour."

Gabriel's face brightened, and Blue Bonnet went to find Uncle Cliff.

"Gabriel says you are blue," she said, cuddling up on the arm of his chair as of old. "Have I neglected you, Uncle Cliff? You know I haven't meant to, but —" she drew a long, trembling sigh, more expressive than words.

"No, Honey. I know how busy you are."

"Getting married is an awful bother. I almost wish we'd just gone quietly to the rector at Trinity — and had it over without all this fuss."

"The occasion is worthy of a ceremony, Blue Bonnet. I'm only afraid that you are over-estimating your strength. You'll be a worn-out bride."

"Did you ever see one that wasn't, Uncle Cliff? There's something wrong with our system. But I have refused the entertainments that were in the air. I couldn't accept the things the girls had planned — not all of them — and I couldn't hurt anybody's feelings, so I refused as tactfully as possible. I hope every one understood."

"I hope so, Honey."

"And I'm not even going to have a trousseau tea."

“ No? ”

“ I hate them.”

“ Everything all right at the Home, these days? ”

“ Yes — and oh, Uncle Cliff, I almost forgot to tell you. A perfectly lovely woman — she doesn't want her name known, so I can't even tell you — has adopted Hans and Gretchen, *both of them*, think of it! Isn't it splendid? She will educate them and bring them up as her very own. A very fine, influential woman who has no children of her own. Fanny Howell found her.”

“ That's fine, Honey; I'm very glad. And when did this happen? ”

“ This morning. I have just come from the Home. The papers are to be made out immediately. And Uncle Cliff — there's something else. You remember I told you about Randall Patterson's going off to Chile so suddenly, and how I felt about it — that perhaps I shouldn't have urged him. Well — read this.”

She searched in her blouse for a detached page of a letter and handed it to her Uncle. He read aloud:

“ I can never be quite grateful enough to you, Blue Bonnet, for putting me on the right track that day at Carmel. It seemed pretty tough at the time, and I thought you were hard on me, but the truth is, I needed just what you gave me, and already I can

see the fruits of your wisdom. Yesterday I was given one of the biggest commissions in this part of the country, and if I make a go of it (which I will) you may congratulate yourself, not me.

“Mary Louise writes me of your engagement to Churchill. May all the happiness in the world be yours. If I—”

Uncle Cliff turned the letter over expectantly, only to find a blank page.

“I didn’t give you all of the letter, Uncle Cliff,” Blue Bonnet explained, blushing prettily. “The rest was—rather personal. But you can’t think how happy this makes me. I’ve suffered tortures over Randall’s going to Chile. I’ve lain awake in the dead of the night seeing him stricken with fever: I’ve been summoned by telegraph to his funeral and held his poor heartbroken mother’s hand all through the service—oh, sometimes it’s been unbearable.”

Uncle Cliff smiled sympathetically.

She slipped down off the chair and turned to go. “I’m glad you’re not blue,” she said, and threw a kiss from the doorway. He smiled after her tenderly.

No one knew—ever would know—just what it was going to cost Uncle Cliff to give Blue Bonnet up. It was true that they would still be together, but never on the old basis. John would be first in her affection, it was right that he should be, of

course, but the old relationship, quite as close as daughter and father, would never be the same.

And yet he was pleased with the match. John Churchill was a fine man; gave promise of being a brilliant man, a success in the world. More than that, Mr. Ashe knew that he would be a kind and faithful husband, and he rejoiced that Blue Bonnet had shown such wisdom in her choice.

On her way to her own room Blue Bonnet stopped a moment to speak with Mrs. White.

"I'm making my peace with all the family this morning," she said as she drew a stool close to Mrs. White's chair. "Gabriel says that I am terribly negligent; that Uncle Cliff is as blue as indigo, or words to that effect. Are you blue, too? Why is a wedding such a solemn occasion?"

"Yours ought not to be, Blue Bonnet."

"That's what I think. Then why all this blueness? We're all going to be right here together. There will be no change."

"That is something I want to speak with you about, Blue Bonnet," Mrs. White said quietly. "There will be no point in my remaining here after you come back from the ranch. I shall be a fifth wheel, and fifth wheels are superfluous. I have asked Miss North for my old position in her school."

"Mrs. White!"

"Yes, dear. I know that with your usual generosity you will insist upon my staying, but I have

very decided ideas upon this question of marriage: one is, that young people should be left entirely to themselves — for the first year at any rate. That is the hardest year of all. It is a period of adjustment, and one needs — ”

“ All the rope possible to hang one’s self neatly,” Blue Bonnet finished with one of her merry smiles. “ Well — according to that, I must shove off Uncle Cliff to dear knows where, dismiss Fräulein, and — ”

“ Not at all. I have a suspicion that your Uncle will feel as I do, and take a little trip for a while. As to Fräulein — Fräulein is of actual service. She is the best housekeeper you could find.”

“ And you — you are almost my mother, Mrs. White. Do girls give up their mothers when they marry? ”

“ They don’t live with them. Not if they are sensible. No house is ever big enough for two families. You’ve heard that, I’m sure.”

“ Ever since I was born, but that doesn’t make it true.”

“ It’s a tried out maxim, my dear.”

“ Nonsense! Well, we’ll not argue about it now,” Blue Bonnet said, “ but I shall *insist*, later. Why, what a deserted house it will be with you away, and *Uncle Cliff* taking trips! ”

“ What a happy household it will be, my dear. Fräulein, to relieve you of all responsibility as to its

management; John enjoying and sharing your pleasures; friends coming and going. You are a very, very lucky girl, Blue Bonnet. I pray that the years may bring no changes greater than the ones you are now contemplating. Life, for you, seems full of promise."

From a matter of weeks the time set for the wedding gradually dwindled to days, and Blue Bonnet's happiness grew with each succeeding hour. The kindness of friends and neighbors amazed and delighted her. The glory-box swelled to such proportions that Cousin Honora's possessions had to be removed to a cedar chest in the attic. Blue Bonnet would not have parted with them for anything. She had visions of fancy dress parties in the dim future when she — and perhaps her children — would don those beautiful old gowns and revel in the fine linen and laces.

Gifts began to pour in, and while they gave Blue Bonnet a great deal of happiness because of the kind thought back of them, she wished that there were not so many — she hardly needed them. However, she began immediately to write her little notes of thanks, and Kitty and Sarah — they had both come to the house to stay until after the wedding — took charge of the presents, and displayed them tastefully in the front bedroom, which had scarcely been opened since Grandmother passed away.

A few days before the wedding a package came



Elizabeth Witherington

"THE PICTURE STOOD FORTH IN ALL ITS BEAUTY"

from Carmel-by-the-Sea which Blue Bonnet made haste to open. She knew from the size and shape that it was a canvas, and her heart beat high at the prospect of owning a real Shravens.

When the wrappings were removed and the picture stood forth in all its beauty, Kitty and Sarah wondered why Blue Bonnet caught her breath so quickly, and then burst into a little smothered laugh. They could see nothing in the picture with its splendid cliff of rocks jutting out into the water, and the long reach of gray green sea, with gulls playing in the breakers to create a laugh, even a smothered one, and looked on wonderingly.

"How beautiful it is," they said, going to the far end of the room to get a better view; "and how wonderful the water. One can almost hear the waves break against those rocks, and the scream of the gulls."

But Blue Bonnet heard more. Randall Patterson's voice drowned the thunder of the waves — his eyes looked forth eagerly, and Blue Bonnet turned away, wondering why Felix Shravens painted *that* view of all others; if fate were not in a sportive mood when she directed his footsteps. She wondered if he *knew* — and cast the thought aside as unworthy. It was one of those unaccountable things that happen in this world without reason.

Other gifts came, too. None more acceptable than an exquisite set of linen from the We Are

Sevens, for Amanda had notified the wanderers and they had pooled their interests as of old. There was quaint and priceless old china from Cousin Honora and Cousin Augusta, and Aunt Lucinda sent a wonderful portrait of her mother, taken as a younger girl, which Blue Bonnet had always coveted.

Uncle Cliff surprised and pleased Blue Bonnet by calling her into the den a few days before her wedding to explain that he had not provided his gift yet — he was not sure that he could get what he wanted, but that he hoped very much to have it ready for her on her return from the honeymoon.

“Why do you get me anything, Uncle Cliff?” she said, and glanced upward to the room where the gifts were arranged with dismay. “It seems wicked for me to have so much, as it is. I’ve been thinking — oh, so hard, how I could give away some of the things without any one’s knowing — I don’t need them any more than a sore thumb, as Uncle Joe always says — wouldn’t Amanda love them for her little flat? There are loads of duplicates, you know.”

And still another thing happened that gave Blue Bonnet the greatest happiness. She was called down to the living-room about four o’clock that same afternoon to find a little group assembled. There was a very shaggy yellow dog that seemed overjoyed to see her; an old man who held a wide white sombrero in his hands, and a smiling brown-

faced old woman who took Blue Bonnet into her arms and wept over her before she relinquished her.

Blue Bonnet's "Uncle Joe and Benita" were a little feeble, but cordial. "Why, how did you manage it — and Solomon, too! It's too good to be true."

"Didn't suppose we was a goin' to let you get married without the family, did you?" Uncle Joe asked. "Where's Cliff?"

"He's out just now, but he'll be in soon. Did you come all alone? Did you have any trouble?"

"No; no trouble, but we're about froze out with this climate. We calculate to be goin' back as soon as possible. Solomon here's been swearin' at the weather ever since we got to Chicago. What the dickens anybody wants to live in Boston for is more than I can find out."

"Now, Uncle Joe, don't fuss. How's the rheumatism?"

"Better. Knight got me some truck that pretty nigh cured it."

Blue Bonnet smiled. "How is Knight?" she inquired. "I'm so sorry he couldn't come too."

"He's fine — say, that's the smartest fellow in the state of Texas. Wish you could see him take hold at the ranch. He's a wonder."

Blue Bonnet took the visitors to their rooms a few minutes later, where they might freshen up after the long journey. Benita was tired, but happy.

She looked about the large, beautiful rooms with wondering eyes; its decorous luxury almost appalled her after the simplicity of the ranch.

“I didn’t know houses ever were so big, Niña,” she said as they climbed the broad stairs and Uncle Joe labored along behind; “it must take much care to keep it so clean.”

Blue Bonnet tried to explain the process of vacuum cleaning, but her words fell on deaf ears. To Benita it was so much Greek.

CHAPTER XXII

ADIÓS ¹

BLUE BONNET's wedding was to occur on Saturday at noon, and on Friday afternoon Annabel arrived. Blue Bonnet went to the station to meet her, and was surprised and delighted to find that Sue had accepted the invitation to come also, and was with her.

Annabel had changed very little in the year that had passed, except to grow a trifle stouter — which was very becoming.

"You've scarcely changed a mite," Blue Bonnet said after she had greeted Sue and assured her of a welcome. "Except — what is it —" the little matronly air which had descended upon Annabel puzzled her.

"Being a mother does *age* one a little bit," Annabel laughed, giving Blue Bonnet's arm a tight squeeze as they passed through the station to the waiting motor. "Doesn't it?"

"I can't see that you've aged a day. But do tell me about little Billy."

¹ Adiós (Farewell).

Annabel needed little urging. He was the most wonderful baby in the world, with his father's blue eyes and fair hair and a suspicion of Sue's dimples, and they called him Junior.

Sue verified everything that Annabel said, adding:

"And he's the *best* baby in the world, Blue Bonnet, but then he should be. He's brought up by rule. He eats and sleeps and takes the fresh air by the clock — *ab-so-lutely*! Nobody dares pick him up if he's down, or down if he's up. Nobody ever rocks him, because it's bad for the disposition and digestion; he goes to sleep in the dark and never wakes up until broad daylight. There isn't a thing in his sleeping room but his little bed and four sunny windows —"

"Sue!" Annabel protested, "how absurd!"

"Well, what is there now? The nurse's bed, perhaps, but not a curtain, nor a rug on the hard wood floor; and his playthings are sterilized every time he drops them — but then, I must say he's a marvel."

Blue Bonnet was leaning back in the motor during the conversation watching Annabel's face in amazement. Was this her old frilly Annabel? Blue Bonnet remembered the old bedroom at Miss North's, filled to the brim with what Sue called "jim-cracks"; ruffled curtains, numerous pictures, endless sofa cushions and a dresser that groaned with silver.

And later another surprise awaited her. It was when she was showing Sue and Annabel her lingerie and wedding finery. Annabel held up a piece of sheer fine white convent embroidered underwear and inspected it critically.

"How sensible you are," she said, as she folded the garment and returned it to others of the kind in the tray of the chest; "how very sensible. I have so often regretted that I had frail lace things, and so many of them. Whenever I see a girl getting ready to be married I wish I might talk to her out of the fullness of my experience."

"But you had such beautiful things, Annabel."

"Yes — just that; beautiful and *perishable!*"

"But why this transformation?" Blue Bonnet could not refrain from asking the question.

"It's *Billy*," Annabel answered magnanimously. "Blue Bonnet, he's wonderful! So plain and practicable and reasonable, with his values always on the right side. Billy's *substantial*, and I'm learning to see through his eyes. We put very little thought on *possessions* — things that pile up and wear out. We buy only the best, and not too much at a time. It comes rather easy for me, because — well — *I had my fling*, as they say, Blue Bonnet. I believe most frivolous girls develop into thoughtful women for that very reason. They've had the froth, and they appreciate the substantial. I'm beginning to feel sorry for men who marry awfully sedate and serious

girls — they're so apt to break out in some unexpected place with the measles of discontent, or the chicken-pox of adventure."

Blue Bonnet laughed softly. It was *so* amazing to hear Annabel expounding theories of wisdom. She could scarcely believe her ears. She looked up thoughtfully after a minute and her eyes were serious.

"I hope," she said, "that marriage will do as much for me, as it has for you. I should like to be as fine as John — for he *is* fine, Annabel. I couldn't begin to tell you all the splendid things I know about him."

Annabel smiled. "Yes; I've no doubt. I think he's charming, but there will be times when you'll find he's just plain *man* and you'll have to make allowances. We're none of us perfect."

"Mrs. White says the *first* year is the very hardest —"

"So it is; but let me tell you what old Charity Lou told me. It has helped me many times. Charity Lou came in to tell me good-by and to offer her congratulation the day I was married, and she said to me — I can see her now, dear old Charity Lou, the tears streaming down her face — 'Honey, you mus' always keep *two bears* in y' house if y' wants to be happy: *bear* and *forbear*. Don't you forget it, and some day you'll thank ole Charity Lou for tellin' you.'"

“*Bear and forbear!*” Blue Bonnet repeated the words softly. “It sounds like mighty good advice. I’ll try and keep it in mind, too.”

The conversation was interrupted at that moment by the entrance of Fräulein.

“May I finish the packing now, Miss Blue Bonnet?” she said.

“Yes, Fräulein, if you will be so good; I have put out all the things I want to take with me. One trunk will be sufficient for the ranch. Mr. Churchill and I expect to live in the saddle and play golf for the next month.” She closed the lid of the chest and opened the closet door to show Annabel some of her gowns. When she had seen them all, and approved of Blue Bonnet’s good taste and judgment, they went in to Annabel’s room to visit for an hour before dinner.

The evening sped on wings, and when the family and guests had said good night, Blue Bonnet found herself alone with John before the living-room fire. The coals had burned low and Blue Bonnet made no effort to revive them.

“I’m going to send you home,” she said, smiling into his happy face, “I must get some beauty sleep to-night. Uncle Cliff objects to a jaded bride.”

“Are you very tired?” he asked tenderly.

“Very tired — *and very happy*, John.”

“And to-morrow — *to-morrow* you will be my own,” he said softly, “*my wife*. The girlhood days

are almost over, Blue Bonnet — you are not afraid to face the future with me? ”

“ No, John — not in the least.”

“ I will do my best to make you happy — to make the way easy.”

Her glance met his clearly.

“ It would never be hard — *with you.*”

His arms tightened about her fiercely and he seemed unashamed of the tears in his eyes.

Blue Bonnet went up to her room slowly after the front door had closed between them. When she entered her room she threw herself down on the *chaise-longue* to think. She had come to the turning point in her life and the thought neither alarmed nor frightened her; she knew that she had made no mistake, and the future stretched ahead mystically beautiful.

She glanced at the foot of her bed where her suitcase and bags stood ready for her journey and from the closet — Fräulein had left the door ajar — peeped forth her dark blue traveling suit with its white blouse and smart little hat in close proximity. When she donned them she would no longer be Blue Bonnet Ashe, but Blue Bonnet Churchill. The thought must have amused her, for her lips wreathed in a sudden smile.

She got up a moment later, and, taking a box from the closet, lifted the lid tenderly. A shimmering white satin gown, rich with beautiful lace, met her

eyes. She gazed at it for a moment rapturously, and then her gaze traveled to her dresser — to two pictures that held a prominent place there. She stretched out her hand toward them eagerly, and a hot tear fell perilously near the filmy folds of the wedding veil. She shrank back in haste.

“Oh, *I must not*,” she said quickly. “It would be dreadful to christen my wedding dress with tears — when I have so much to be thankful for. Who am *I* that I should expect so much of life? I must count my blessings and be thankful.”

A moment later she had put the box away, taken a quick look at the heavens to see if the stars presaged a clear wedding day, and hastened to bed.

A wedding, viewed in retrospect, loses much of the glamour. Joy is tinged with sadness; poignancy stalks an unwelcome guest amidst gayety and happiness.

Mrs. White sat alone in her room after the last guest had departed thinking over the past few hours. Blue Bonnet was married — gone. The merriment that had followed the wedding breakfast had suddenly subsided; the guests had scattered. Miss Clyde, with Sarah and Amanda, had returned on an early evening train to Woodford. Kitty had gone back to her duties at the Home; Sue, Annabel, and

Carita, had accepted an invitation to Miss North's to spend the night amid old surroundings.

The house seemed desolate. Mrs. White wondered how Mr. Ashe felt. He had gone into the den shortly after Miss Clyde left and closed the door. She had seen nothing of him since. Upon the floor above, Uncle Joe and Gabriel had crept into bed, tired out with the day's excitement.

How beautiful Blue Bonnet had been in her wedding garments. Mrs. White leaned back in her chair and recalled the vision — the long single aisle at Trinity, so admirably suited to weddings, Carita and Annabel, charming in their soft filmy gowns, and the stately bride, radiant in her shimmering satin, with the snowy veil falling like a cloud about her.

How sweetly serious she had been, and thoughtful. Mrs. White would never forget the smile she had directed toward her uncle when she turned away from the altar; a sweet all-embracing smile which seemed to say, "even in this great happiness *you* are not forgotten." He had smiled back reassuringly, but beneath the smile there was pain — Alicia White knew there was. It could not be otherwise. The relationship had been too close to sever without regret.

Over the silence arose again the merry babble of voices; voices of young people raised in jest as John and Blue Bonnet made ready to escape their

absurd pranks. Blue Bonnet had paused at the head of the stairs to throw her bouquet. It had landed in Sarah's outstretched hands, much to Blue Bonnet's amusement, and she had called mischievously: "Remember what Sivrouka said, Sarah — those motherless children, you know. Do be careful!" Then she had blown a dozen kisses from her gloved fingertips and vanished to be seen no more; for Simpkins had received explicit instructions to be in readiness at the rear entrance and out-distance all automobiles that followed.

It was all over. To-morrow morning Alicia White would rise to face new duties — if not to face them, to contemplate them — for she was leaving this beautiful home which had been such a haven as soon as she had fulfilled certain commissions for Blue Bonnet.

She rose presently, with a sigh, and moved about the room, her eyes falling wistfully upon familiar objects that had contributed largely to her comfort. How secure she had been here — how comfortable and content — and now it was all to end.

She had not changed her gown since the festivities, and as she leaned for a moment against the white mantel, her hand shading her brow, she presented a picture good to look upon; for Alicia White had regained her youth in harmonious surroundings; she had flowered into unexpected loveliness. Her eyes — blue to-night, and clear and dark

as sapphire — held a tender pensive expression; her face slightly flushed seemed to have caught the glow from the rose-pink dress she was wearing.

She crossed the room after a while and closed the inside shades for the night. The wind was rising. The rattle at the casement made her think of something. She had not closed off Blue Bonnet's room, nor put away the wedding gown as she had intended.

She slipped across the hall quietly, pressed a button just inside Blue Bonnet's door and a flood of light filled the room. From the deep chair drawn close to a low fire a man rose. Mrs. White stepped back in alarm.

"Oh, Mr. Ashe," she said, and paused awkwardly. She had thought him shut away in the den. The sight of him there alone in the dark startled her.

"Was there something you wanted?" he asked, moving toward the door. He gave no excuse for being there — he merely waited for her answer.

"I wanted to see if everything was safe for the night; I wanted to be sure the windows were closed — the wind is coming up; and I promised Blue Bonnet that I would put away her gown."

He glanced toward the bed where the dress lay as she had left it.

"It's going to be pretty lonely without her." he

said — and for a moment something stopped his utterance.

“ Yes — you have been very close for so many years.”

“ Very close; *father, mother — uncle* — so she always said.” He left the room. When he reached the head of the stairs he turned and glanced back for a moment, then went on down slowly.

Mrs. White closed the blinds, made the room tidy, and when she had laid away the wedding dress between folds of tissue paper she closed the door and locked it. She stood outside, her hand on the knob for a moment, thinking. She wondered if she could do anything for Mr. Ashe — anything to make him more comfortable. She remembered that Blue Bonnet always ran into the den for a minute the last thing before she went to her room for the night.

She hesitated because she did not wish to intrude, but finally she turned and went down the stairs softly.

She found him in the den in the big chair, with Algernon Sidney perched contentedly on the broad arm.

“ I wondered if I could do anything for you, Mr. Ashe,” she began — “ anything to make you more comfortable. This has been such an exciting day. There must have been many things left undone.”

Mr. Ashe drew a chair up rather close to his own and glanced at the timepiece on the mantel.

"You might sit down a while," he answered, and his face lighted. "It's deucedly lonely — and it's early. Only nine o'clock."

She sank back in the deep cosy chair.

"It is lonely. A wedding is always twin to a funeral, somehow. There is something ghostly and forlorn about a house after the bride has flown."

From where she sat she could look out into the living-room. Signs of the festivities still remained, although Hester had made a pretense at tidiness. Mrs. White, herself, had sent her to bed; she looked so tired and sleepy. On the broad table lay a collection of odd gloves, forgotten in the last rush by careless guests, and here and there a rose, or bit of trailing green had fallen on the floor.

Silence reigned for a few minutes. Each seemed lost in thought. It was Mrs. White who spoke first.

"I shall be going away the first of the week," she said, and raised her eyes to his slowly, "back to Miss North's. She has been kind enough to take me in. If there is anything — anything special — that I could see to for you before I go, I shall be glad; but, of course, there isn't," she broke off suddenly. "Fräulein is so capable. She will attend to everything until Blue Bonnet returns."

Clifford Ashe leaned forward in his chair with a start.

"You say you are going away — leaving us?" Surprise was in his voice; in his eyes.

"Yes; didn't Blue Bonnet tell you? She thoroughly understood. We talked about it several times."

"No; she did not tell me. Why are you going?"

It was Alicia's turn to show surprise.

"Why, because — surely I am not needed *now*. Blue Bonnet will never be lonely again. She will have her husband, her household duties, her friends for diversion. Besides — I don't believe in mixing up families. Young people should be by themselves the first year."

She was sorry the moment she had spoken. Perhaps Mr. Ashe might think she was trying to suggest to him — his going was *his* affair.

He nodded sympathetically.

"I agree with you," he said. "I was trying to reconcile myself to that thought — to-night —"

"But she will never consent to your going away," she interrupted; "not for long — a visit, perhaps."

Again there was silence. The little clock on the mantel ticked patiently. Outside, the wind was blowing in gusts, cold fitful gusts that suggested storm. Mr. Ashe stirred the fire into a pleasant glow. When he returned to his chair he paused for a moment by the side of Alicia's chair.

She looked up wonderingly. There was an expression in his eyes she had never seen there before.

It was not the loving, half-humorous glance that he invariably bestowed upon Blue Bonnet. It was the look of a man who was hungry — starved for affection; the affection of a woman.

“Is there any way,” he said abruptly, “that you might be persuaded to reconsider? I have a counter offer. Will you be my wife, Alicia? You must know how much I care — how my love has been growing these past months. And I *need* you — *need* you, just as you need me.”

“But, Blue Bonnet!” Alicia exclaimed breathlessly. “How would *she* feel?”

“The question is, how do *you* feel?”

The old humorous light had sprung to his eyes, and Mrs. White smiled up into them.

“I feel,” she said, as tears slowly filled her eyes, “that life is better than I ever dreamed it could be — if — if it gives me you. You are so much more than I deserve.”

Outside the wind rose in a fury; it beat against the casement and shrieked about the house, but, for the first time in her life, Alicia White heeded it not. She had found shelter at last. Shelter in the strong arms that held her close; peace in the clear eyes that met her own wonderingly.

THE END

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